NOVEMBER 2023
VOLUME 33
ISSUE 9

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ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Geoff Andrew, Lou Thomas, Adam Nayman, June Givanni, Jan Asante, Melanie Hoye, Tambay Obenson, Catherine Wheatley, Kim Newman, Caitlin Quinlan, Rachel Pronger, Alex Ramon, Simran Hans, Travis Jeppesen, Ehsan Khoshbakht, Annabel Bai Jackson, Christina Newland, Iain Sinclair, Sophia Satchell-Baeza and more

GLEESON PORTRAIT: BRID O'DONOVAN

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27 OCTOBER

CURZON

Mike Williams
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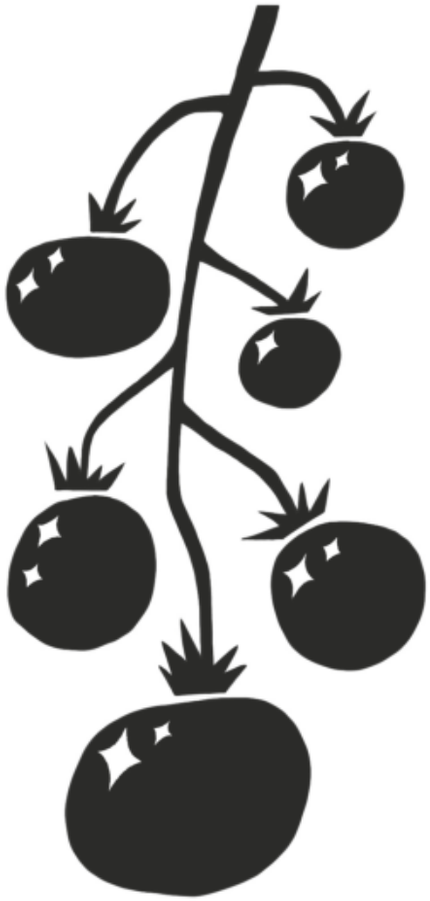
There's something rotten in the state of film discourse. Curation is the cure



An entire ecosystem of decisions are being made based on the Tomatometer, the aggregator of opinions scorched of all context, boiled down to a simple thumbs up or down

I won't bore you with too many details, but for moderately gruesome reasons (a bloodthirsty van driver, a pedestrian crossing, angelic paramedics), I've been distant from the graft of producing this issue. Doped up to my eyeballs, I pored over the *Sight and Sound* communications channels looking for ways to make myself feel useful. I failed. What a pleasure it's been, though, watching the team pull this brilliant edition together. I hope you enjoy it as much as I already have.

I send this dispatch from my recovery pit, surrounded by well-thumbed magazines and chocolate wrappers, my phone pinging with recommendations from friends and colleagues of films to watch, books to read, music to listen to. The stuff that heals your soul while the medication goes to work on your body. To pay it forward, I recommend to you: Pablo Larraín's political vampire satire *El conde*, now streaming on Netflix; Jane Giles and Ali Catterall's stirring documentary *Scala!!!*, about the legendary London rep cinema, which screens at the BFI London Film Festival; our columnist Nicole Flattery's debut novel *Nothing Special*, set in the world of Andy Warhol; and *Empire* editor Nick de Semlyen's latest oral history *The Last Action Heroes*. All are excellent ways to pass the time.

A few bumps on the head and too much time on the sofa have drawn me back into social media and the dreaded doomscroll. A trending piece by Vulture, the pop culture section of *New York* magazine, caught my eye one morning, reporting that Rotten Tomatoes, the reviews-aggregating website, had been manipulated by a PR firm which was caught paying people to positively review films it was repping to secure that lucrative 'fresh!' rating. I hesitate to call these mercenaries writers for the same reason I wouldn't call someone a "thinker" because they sometimes had thoughts.

I encourage you to read the Vulture piece in full, which posits that an entire ecosystem of decisions are being made based on the Tomatometer, the aggregator of opinions scorched of all context, boiled down to a simple thumbs up or down. RT being so susceptible to influence both by money and fan lobbies is a huge issue, but an industry and culture being mangled in the gears of capitalism to the point that a meaningless metric has been let loose to play God is insane.

Maybe it's the painkillers talking, but I can't help but feel that placing the cultural direction of humanity in the hands of people whose only qualification seemed to be that they were good at using the internet was a mistake. A lack of pushback, whether through fear or apathy, has empowered them, and now they've handed that power to the already-powerful to supercharge a monetisable monoculture. These things get dressed up as democratisation, but it's a narrowing of bandwidth, a penning in of the masses to feed them slop while telling them it's good for them and there's no other choice.

Bummed out, I turned to old friends to make me feel better, burying myself in the last four years of *S&S*, working through every issue I've helped make, watching the magazine evolve in front of me into what it is today. Vainly reading over my old editorials, I saw common themes swirl around like a fever dream: the toxicity of the internet, the sorry state of online film discourse, the fan-lobby numbskulls who go after Scorsese, the need for curation in a world full of static. The same old moan, over and over, all attracted together by this Rotten Tomatoes story like flies to, well, a rotten tomato.

Hope comes from the one positive on that list: curation. Things might look broken because the quickest buck wins or the stans shout loudest, but the curators are alive, if pushed even further to the fringes. Whether that's festivals, programmers, DVD labels like Second Run, distributors like New Wave, repositories of untapped talent like Blacklist or, the world I know the best, magazines and websites, these focused, curated entities remain, full of nuance, context, knowledge, expertise, passion, inspiration and graft.

S&S's reach has grown massively in the last couple of years, yet we've never been more fringe. That makes what we do even more important, because the thirst on those fringes for undiluted, well-curated cultural criticism remains strong. *Little White Lies* has just turned 100 issues old. The Museum of the Moving Image's *Reverse Shot* is marking 20 years with a special anniversary anthology. Rumours abound that *Film Comment* might produce a print special soon. These are publications that should be cherished sufficiently to not go the way of *The White Review*, which is ceasing publication, and *Cinema Scope*, which is struggling with its quarterly format.

The point, if this dispatch has one, is that it's easy to see the dumbing down of culture and discourse as irreparable, and that may well be the case. But rather than allow that knowledge to breed negative feelings, as I often do, the smarter thing to do is to dig deeper into that fringe to find more trusted sources and more inspiring curators, and to remember that there are fields and fields of free-range thinkers who want to feast on organic tomatoes, not rotten ones.

As I type, the news has just broken that the WGA have agreed the deal they've been striking for five months to secure. That's people power for you, and inspiration that all is not lost. Now where did I put those painkillers?

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- DANIEL O'BRIEN, *SPOOKY ENCOUNTERS: A GWAILO'S GUIDE TO HONG KONG HORROR*

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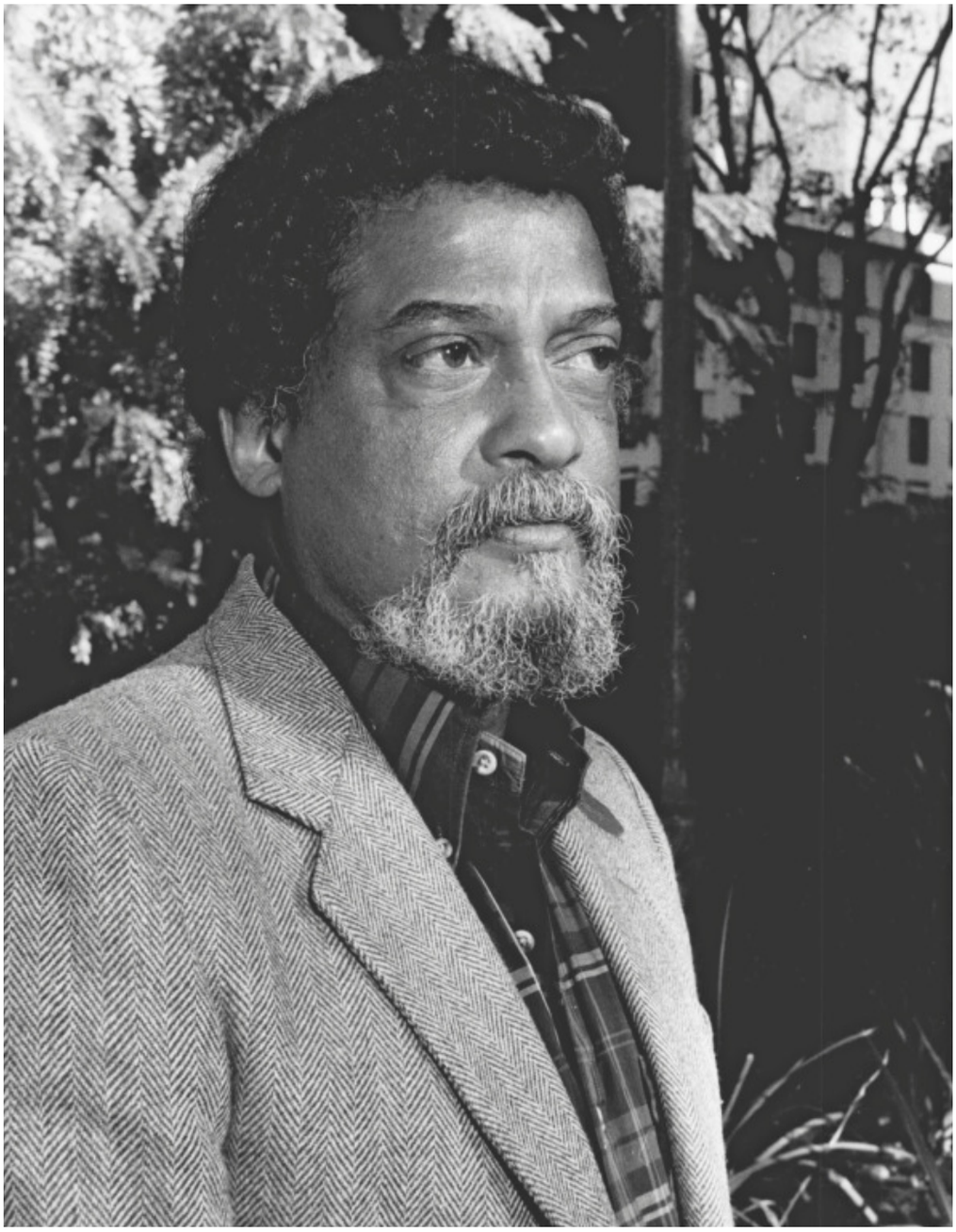


Horace Ové 1936-2023

Whether working in drama or documentary, the pioneering director retained his political voice, revealing a fascination with the textures and social realities of Black British life in a multicultural nation

BY ASHLEY CLARK

Sir Horace Ové, who has died at the age of 86 following a battle with Alzheimer's disease, was a pivotal figure in British culture. His work across media, including film, television and photography, was characterised by a unique combination of tactile humanism, brusque unsentimentality and, in the words of his son, the artist Zak Ové, an unyielding commitment to depicting "how, for the first time, articulate Black voices stood up to hold the world accountable for the neglect and injustice that had been our history".

Ové is perhaps best known for making history by becoming the first Black director of a feature film in Britain, with the remarkable drama *Pressure* (1975). Co-written by Ové and fellow Trinidad-born novelist Samuel Selvon, produced by Robert Buckler and filmed in vivid, neorealism-inspired style on the streets of Ladbroke Grove in west London, the film explored the daily realities of a young British-born Black person – 16-year-old Tony (Herbert Norville) – with a degree of empathy and psychological insight hitherto unafforded to Black characters in British cinema.

In Tony – who finds himself both at odds with his religious, conservative Trinidad-born parents and subject to indignities large and small served up by a prejudiced society – Ové and Selvon crafted a human prism through which to illuminate the plight of an emerging generational cohort that included my own father, who was born in London to parents who had emigrated from Jamaica in the 1950s as part of the Windrush generation. When I first saw *Pressure*, which features unvarnished depictions of police brutality and explores the profound effects of implicit and explicit racism, it felt like I was watching a raw articulation of truths that my father was never likely to volunteer himself.

It has long been rumoured that *Pressure*'s financiers, the British Film

Institute Production Board, considered the film's content incendiary, and therefore held back its release for more than two years following its premiere at the 1975 London Film Festival. (In a 2005 interview, Ové questioned the BFI's full commitment in the first place: "Well, the BFI didn't really want to do it, to be quite honest... [they were] a bit worried about doing it at the time.") However, a 1978 article in *Time Out* reported a more prosaic story of byzantine, bureaucratic distribution wrangles involving multiple protagonists leading to the delay. Regardless, it is a shame that the release of this significant work was handled in such an imperfect way.

A natural radical and critic of the establishment, Ové never had an easy time securing funding for his work. But he was driven from the start by an unquenchable passion for cinema. Born in 1936 in Port of Spain's Belmont suburb, he grew up at a time when Trinidad, then under British colonial rule, was studded with American military bases that boasted cinemas. One, the Olympic Theatre, was where Ové's love of film blossomed, and he had decided by the age of nine that he wanted to be a filmmaker.

That dream would come to fruition, but in 1960 he moved to cold, grey England to study painting, photography and interior design ("I encountered terrible racism at that time... People were very unpleasant and treated me like a slave," Ové recalled of these years in 2015).

To supplement his income he worked as a film extra, including on the Hollywood epic *Cleopatra* (1963). When the production changed directors and moved to Rome's Cinecittà Studios, Ové followed the cast and crew, remaining in Italy for several years after shooting concluded to closely study the work of filmmakers like Michelangelo Antonioni and Vittorio De Sica. Ové's experiences in Italy ultimately inspired him to return to England to study at the London School of Film Technique (now London Film School). In 1966, he made his first short documentary, the acupuncture study *The Art of the Needle*, but found his initial attempts to create more expansive and experimental work thwarted.

Ové raised money for, and shot part of, a film called *Man Out*, a surrealistic fable about a writer experiencing a mental breakdown, but the then-head of the BFI Production Board Bruce Beresford (the future director of 1989's *Driving Miss Daisy*) refused to back it. It was the type of rejection that would become a lifelong source of frustration for Ové. "I believe that film is an art and I'm interested in experimenting and taking it further, but I know that's a problem because we live in a society where they don't associate that sort of creativity with Black people," Ové told curator June Givanni in 1996 in an interview for the BFI's *Black Film Bulletin*.

Despite such challenges, Ové would develop an admirably diverse body of work. His gripping *vérité*-style documentary *Baldwin's Nigger* (1968), filmed at London's West Indian Students' Centre, featured the intensely charismatic writer James Baldwin, alongside comedian Dick Gregory, addressing a group of students about the Black experience in America and how it related to Britain and the Caribbean.

The film offered thrillingly unfiltered evidence of thriving political discourse among young Black people in Britain – a refreshing corrective to the era's televisual tradition of white pundits ruminating on 'the race problem' – courtesy of the rarest bird at the time: a Black filmmaker. "I remember arriving at the centre with my camera crew to shoot the film, and even West Indians were laughing," Ové recalled in 1991. "'What are you doing with the camera, boy?'... It was obviously strange to them, at that time, to see a Black man making films."

Ové crafted authoritative documentary studies of Caribbean cultural phenomena, including 1971's *Reggae*, the first film to place the emergent Jamaican musical genre in context for British audiences

He crafted authoritative documentary studies of Caribbean cultural phenomena, including 1971's *Reggae*, the first film to place the emergent Jamaican musical genre in context for British audiences; and, for the BBC series *The World About Us*, an episode titled 'King Carnival' (1973), which shone a spotlight on the multicultural roots of the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival. Ové, by now a fixture in a thriving west London community of Black writers, playwrights, poets, dancers, musicians, singers and activists, also starred in the wickedly satirical spoof travelogue 'The Black Safari' (1972, also for *The World About Us*), and associate-produced Franco Rosso's short documentary *The Mangrove Nine* (1973), about the nine Black activists who were put on trial for supposedly inciting a riot following continual police targeting of a Notting Hill Caribbean restaurant named The Mangrove. The story went on to be filmed on an epic scale by Steve McQueen in *Small Axe: Mangrove* (2020).

In 1979, Ové directed three episodes of the BBC drama *Empire Road* – a breakthrough for onscreen representation for Black and Asian characters on British television – as well as the *Play for Today* film 'A Hole in Babylon', a dramatisation of the 1975 Knightsbridge 'Spaghetti House siege', in which a bungled attempt by three Black men to commit an armed robbery escalated into a protracted standoff. In the eyes of the police and much of the British press, the men were violent thugs, but Ové fleshed out their psychology and political motivations.

The director brought his searing moral clarity to *Who Shall We Tell?* (1985), a TV documentary about the Bhopal gas tragedy in India the previous year, then directed his second, and final, theatrically released feature: the entertaining but pointed culture-clash cricket comedy *Playing Away* (1986). He continued to make striking fiction and nonfiction TV work into the 1990s and 2000s, and served as a North Star for a younger generation of Black British filmmakers including John Akomfrah, Isaac Julien, Menelik Shabazz and Ngozi Onwurah.

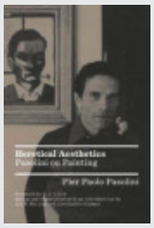
His Channel 4 drama series *The Orchid House* (1991) starred a young Lennie James, who expressed his gratitude in a *Guardian* article on the director's work upon Ové's knighting in 2022 (following a CBE in 2007). "So many of us consider him our inspiration. He was one of the first to crack through the glass ceiling and he did so with others in mind." There will never be another Sir Horace Ové, and his impact cannot be overstated.

BELOW
Herbert Norville as Tony in *Pressure* (1975)

The retrospective 'Power to the People: Horace Ové's Radical Vision' runs at BFI Southbank, London, from 23 October to 24 November. *Pressure* is available to watch on BFI Player and will be rereleased in UK cinemas in a 4K restoration on 23 November

EDITORS' CHOICE

Recommendations from the *Sight and Sound* team



HERETICAL AESTHETICS – PASOLINI ON PAINTING

Verso

Pier Paolo Pasolini was a distinguished poet, novelist and essayist as well as one of the pre-eminent filmmakers of his era. All well-trodden territory, but it is not as well known that he studied under art historian Roberto Longhi and developed his own figurative art practice. He also wrote essays and reviews permeated by his idiosyncratic, "heretical" blend of communism, classicism, localism and much else besides. Most of the items assembled in this volume are translated into English for the first time and shed light not only on Pasolini's creative output, but also how central it was to his cinematic sensibility. The book is prefaced by an essay putting the articles in the context of post-war Italian culture.

Kieron Corless, associate editor

OUT THERE SCREAMING: AN ANTHOLOGY OF NEW BLACK HORROR

Picador

"I view horror as catharsis through entertainment. It's a way to work through your deepest pain and fear – but for Black people that isn't possible, and for many decades wasn't possible, without the stories being told in the first place." So writes Jordan Peele in his foreword to the Black horror anthology *Out There Screaming*, of which he is the editor. What could be more cathartic than this thoroughly chilling collection of tales featuring spirits, monsters, sinister technology, foreboding hallucinations and more? Running the gamut from grounded-in-reality shocks to fully supernatural thrills, there's something for horror fans of all varieties.

Thomas Flew, editorial assistant

A YEAR IN THE FIELD

In UK cinemas now and on Curzon Home Cinema

Christopher Morris's *A Year in the Field* is a rare climate-change documentary: a call to action that manages to capture the despairing, dread-induced inaction so many of us face when reading about the latest ecological disaster. "I've never glued my hand to a road, or strapped myself to a tree," Morris says. Instead, he's created this "one-man vigil" by spending a year in a Cornwall field, filming a 4,000-year-old standing rock. The Longstone, "still and sentinel" beneath beautiful, melodramatic montages of changing skies, appears almost sentient through Morris's gaze, standing in judgement (or approval?) as the director's voiceover shares sobering facts about global warming. Side 'characters' – crepuscular visitors such as badgers and foxes, or the slug whose Sisyphean ascent of the rock's surface is given almost three minutes of screentime – offer some relief from the doom. But the doc is no distraction tactic. The galvanising effect of staring at a rock for 86 minutes might just surprise you.

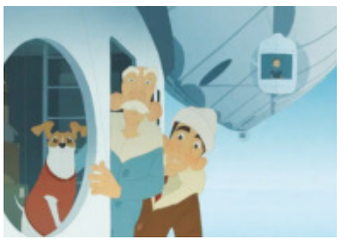
Katie McCabe, reviews editor

FESTIVAL LUMIÈRE

Lyon, France, 14-22 October

Lyon is the home of the factory that belonged to cinema pioneers Auguste and Louis Lumière, and since 2009 it has been the site of a wide-ranging festival celebrating global film history. Directed by Cannes chief Thierry Frémaux, it is a starry affair for an archive festival, and it covers the very long story of cinema since the workers exited those factory gates in 1895. Guests of honour this year include Wes Anderson and Alexander Payne, while Wim Wenders will receive the prestigious Lumière Award. Ozu Yasujirō and Robert Altman are both subjects of retrospectives, and the classics strand bursts with fresh restorations, while new films in the programme include Miyazaki's *The Boy and the Heron*. More bona fide crowd-pleasers include Disney's *The Jungle Book* (1967) (pictured above) and an all-night *Star Wars* marathon.

Pamela Hutchinson, Weekly Film Bulletin editor



DISCOVERY FILM FESTIVAL

Dundee Contemporary Arts, 21 October - 5 November

When was the last time a foreign-language family film was released in cinemas? And how are future audiences for world cinema being nurtured in the UK if these films go straight into the streaming black hole? Providing an alternative to the Pixar and Peter Rabbit big-screen diet is this excellent children's film festival. I can wholeheartedly recommend *Titina* (pictured above) as a visual treat for grown-ups as well: Norwegian director Kajsa Næss's debut feature recounts the story of explorer Roald Amundsen's 1926 expedition to the North Pole, seen through the eyes of his fox terrier. The entrancing animation is interlaced with footage of the actual exploration. Note to Scottish readers: the Discovery programme will tour around the country's cinemas.

Isabel Stevens, managing editor

THE OTHERS

Criterion

In time for the Halloween season, Criterion is releasing a new 4K restoration of *The Others* (2001) on Blu-ray disc, Alejandro Amenábar's ghostly 1940s-set melodrama – a haunted-house tale of a post-war single mother and the unnerving strangers who arrive unexpectedly at her isolated Jersey mansion. The director, who also wrote the film and composed its eerie score, creates a series of beautiful tableaux laced with creeping dread. While it revels in its deployment of all the classical gothic tropes and themes of madness, trauma, grief and family, it carefully avoids veering into parody. Now, more than two decades since its release, it has become a horror classic in its own right; a misty mood piece and one of Nicole Kidman's most effective performances.

Hannah Gatward, production coordinator

Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice...

BY LOU THOMAS AND THOMAS FLEW

Tim Burton has spent the production downtime created by the Sag-Aftra strike editing *Beetlejuice 2* in the south of France. The director had only a day and half left of principal photography left to shoot before the strike started. He says: "I feel lucky that we got as far as we did. It is like 98, 99 per cent done. It was a great experience that reinvigorated my love of making movies."

The original 1988 *Beetlejuice* was a breakout success for both Burton and Michael Keaton, the villain of the title, before their collaboration on *Batman* (1989). Keaton, Winona Ryder and Catherine O'Hara reprise their roles from the first film, which Burton didn't watch again in preparation because "it didn't feel like it would help. I treated it just very much as a project where, after 35 years, the anchor for me is what happened to Lydia [Ryder's character]? What happened to the Deetz family? What happened to the living people? What happens to people we see at one stage in their life, then we see them many years later? What the fuck happened to that person?" Insisting that he tried to shoot the film with "the same spirit" as the first, Burton says it will have "no digital effects", instead relying on puppets, strings, wires and make-up.

He also confirmed his involvement in the second season of *Wednesday*, Netflix's *Addams Family* spin-off series. Jenna Ortega, who with Willem Dafoe and Monica Bellucci is among the new members of the *Beetlejuice 2* cast, returns in the lead role. Of Ortega, Burton says: "She's one of the most aware, not only as an actress, but everything around the camera, the set. And she's done a lot of horror movies, which I love too. That gave her a special place in my heart. 'Oh, you're doing another horror. Good.'"

Beginning this month, Burton is being honoured in Italy, with the Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Turin presenting 'The World of Tim Burton', which runs from 11 October until 7 April 2024.

TO LOVE A GUY IN LA

Todd Haynes's new project is a gay romance set in 1930s Los Angeles between a corrupt police officer (Joaquin Phoenix) and a Native American (yet to be cast). Speaking to *Variety*, Haynes described the film as "a love story... with a strong sexual component" and said he hoped to shoot using the same crew as for his imminent release *May December*.

SIMÓN SINGALONG

A 'neorealist flamenco musical' may not be what you'd expect from the director of heartbreaking family dramas *Summer 1993* (2017) and *Alcarràs* (2022), but it's what we're getting. Carla Simón's unnamed project will be filmed in Barcelona, with production currently slated for 2026.

DADDY ISSUES

The director, co-writer and star of *The Worst Person in the World* (2021) – Joachim Trier, Eskil Vogt and Renate Reinsve – are reuniting for *Sentimental Value*. Reinsve will play Nora, an actor who has a difficult relationship with her father.

HEADS UP Burton and Geena Davis on the set of *Beetlejuice* (1988)

Stories in brief

HOLLAND'S REFUGEE TALE CRITICISED

Polish director Agnieszka Holland has received a vitriolic response to her Venice winner *Green Border* from her country's government. Set on the Polish-Belarus border and inspired by real refugee stories, the film angered the right-wing justice minister Zbigniew Ziobro, who compared it to Nazi propaganda, despite not having seen it. The European Film Academy and the Federation of European Screen Directors released statements in support of Holland.

ALL CHANGE AT THE BERLINALE

Berlinale artistic director Carlo Chatrian is to leave after the 2024 edition, following a restructure. Executive director Mariëtte Rissenbeek will also step down. Radu Jude, Martin Scorsese and Joanna Hogg are among more than 300 filmmakers who have protested about his departure, blaming culture minister Claudia Roth.

THE BELMONT IS BACK

Aberdeen's Belmont Filmhouse, which shut alongside Edinburgh's Filmhouse in late 2022 when parent charity Centre for the Moving Image went into administration, is set to reopen as Belmont Community Cinema in 2024. It will be a space "for all arts" but with a focus on being a not-for-profit, locally run cinema.

EDINBURGH FILMHOUSE RAISING MONEY

Meanwhile, a crowdfunder has been launched to refurbish and relaunch the Edinburgh Filmhouse. Caledonian Heritable, which acquired the space this year, is undertaking core building work and will donate projection equipment, while the funding campaign will cover all other expenses; at press time it had reached 30 per cent of its £250,000 target.

A NEW WORLD FOR CINEMA SCOPE

In his editor's note for Canadian film magazine *Cinema Scope*'s 96th edition, Mark Peranson suggests the next issue may be the magazine's last in its current quarterly schedule. We sincerely hope the magazine will continue to exist, in whatever form it may take.

ABOVE
Agnieszka Holland's *Green Border*

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ABOVE Mia McKenna-Bruce and Shaun Thomas in *How to Have Sex*

MOLLY MANNING WALKER

DIRECTOR/WRITER

BY RACHEL PRONGER

Cannes prizewinner *How to Have Sex* is an exuberant but devastating take on female friendship and teenage sexual awakening

Following three best friends as they embark on a rowdy girls' holiday on the Greek party island of Malia, Molly Manning Walker's blistering first feature *How to Have Sex* captures the chaos, mischief and excess of British teens abroad. Fuelled by silly jokes, cheesy chips and endless sticky vodka shots, the girls tear up the town, and reluctant virgin Tara (Mia McKenna-Bruce) sees an opportunity to finally undergo a crucial rite of passage. But behind Tara's bravado lies a young woman trying to find herself. Manning Walker offers a nuanced exploration of the effects of a highly sexualised, casually misogynist subculture.

ABOVE Molly Manning Walker

Q In the credits you thank "anyone Molly was ever on a girls' holiday with". I assume you drew on personal experience for the film?

A Yes, definitely. I went on maybe four girls' holidays, to Ayia Napa, Ibiza, Magaluf... I went to Ibiza three times in one summer for some reason. I don't often see the people I went on holiday with, but we met up for a wedding in Ibiza and started talking. There were these memories that I thought I had expanded in my head – like the onstage blowjob scene in the film, which we actually saw in Magaluf – but everyone had the same memories. I started to think about how that affected our ideas of sex and consent. I was writing something else at the time, so I went back and was like, "I think I need to tell this story. I need to dig into what we experienced."

Q How did you manage to capture that messy 'Brits abroad' atmosphere so vividly?

A We had to shoot out of season because in season it's carnage. We did all the party scenes in the first two weeks and the locals were amazing, they gave us the run of the strip. The extras were cast from the island, which meant they really understood the party scene.

Q Those scenes are completely convincing. How did you shoot those drunken exchanges in bars, clubs and ladies' loos?

A Our producer had a technique that was spinning around on the spot and calling action so the actors would sort of stumble into it. It's so hard to do drunk! One of the tricks is to try to prove to the other person that you're not drunk. The scene in the toilets originally had full dialogue, but I stripped it all out and just let them wobble about.

Q Mia McKenna-Bruce is fantastic as Tara, with a mixture of vulnerability, strength and humour. How did you cast her?

A We thought Tara would be the trickiest to find, but actually I saw Mia's tape and straight away I went, "Damn, she's the one." I think often the onscreen concept of a victim is someone who's traumatised and can't come back from it, and I really wanted to fight against that.

We talked about Tara being the loudest in the room, being able to crack a joke at an inappropriate moment, in the way that we all do to try to get out of hard situations. Mia is a real force.

Q The film is about the effect that a sexualised society has on young people, and especially how this shapes their coming of age and questions of consent.

A Everybody is asking about the meaning of the title, and I think what sums it up is that we thought we were meant to have sex in a certain way. The pressure comes from all angles – the opposite sex, the environment, your friendship [group], alcohol... Imagine a world where there was less pressure and no preconception of what your first sexual experience would be. We're so far down the rabbit hole of what people think a sexual experience should be and, for young people, that's really dangerous.

Q Do you have any favourite coming-of-age films?

A I think *Fish Tank* [2009] is my all-time favourite film. Do you know *The Tribe* [2014], the Ukrainian film? And *La Haine* [1995], could we call that coming-of-age? I don't know, I feel like it's not just teenagers, I feel like I'm always coming of age!

Q There's been a series of great British debuts recently by the likes of Charlotte Regan [*Scrapper*], Charlotte Wells [*Aftersun*, 2022] and Georgia Oakley [*Blue Jean*, 2022] – all of which explore the lives of girls and young women. You were the cinematographer on *Scrapper*. Do you feel like you're part of a wave?

A It feels like a revolution. Internationally, there's this huge push of female filmmakers and it's amazing to be a part of. I couldn't have made this film without Charlotte Regan. She's like a best friend but also a mentor. There's a real sense of community and trust. There's always [been a] boys' club, and it's hard – when women have often been pushed aside – to find your girls' club. But now it feels like it's forming, big time.

How to Have Sex is in UK cinemas from 3 November and is reviewed on page 85

A FILM BY STEVE EXETER

ÒRAN NA H-EALA

STARRING

SHANNON DAVIDSON

AS

MOIRA SHEARER

OUT NOW

On the waterfront

Nicolas Philibert's perceptive, patient and sympathetic documentary examines a Parisian day centre for people who are dealing with issues around their mental health

BY GEOFF ANDREW

The stark double-verb title of Nicolas Philibert's *Être et avoir* (*To Be and to Have*, 2002) suggests not only his abiding interest in language and communication, but the interrelated themes central to his documentaries. First, what it means to be alive, and be identified as a certain kind of being. Second, what being alive brings us: not possessions, but emotions, ideas, beliefs, relationships, experiences. From his early films about mountaineering and *In the Land of the Deaf* (1992), as well as the aforementioned portrait of a traditional rural school, through to *Nénette* (2010, about a 40-year-old orangutan living in a Parisian zoo) and *Each and Every Moment* (2018, about nurses confronted with human suffering), Philibert has repeatedly returned to core questions about how we live (and why), and how challenges might be faced, or overcome.

On the Adamant, the Golden Bear winner at this year's Berlinale, is no exception, dealing as it does with a mental-health day centre on the barge of the title, which floats on the Seine in central Paris. As ever, in showing the interplay between staff and patients – "*les passagers*", as Philibert calls them – the film offers no explicit judgements but observes closely yet discreetly, patiently and perceptively, sympathetically but without sentimentality. He's too honest an artist to pretend his presence behind the camera – accompanied, half of the time, by a crew of three – is going unnoticed; occasionally his subjects address him directly. But as in all of his films – including *Every Little Thing* (1997), which chronicled preparations for a play performed by patients and staff at La Borde psychiatric clinic in the Loire valley – he lets viewers make up their own minds about what they see and hear. Still, the film clearly has a political dimension; as with that earlier work about the treatment of mental health, in its profoundly respectful portrayal of everyone involved with the Adamant day centre, it effectively undercuts many erroneous and damaging assumptions about those with psychological disorders.

Philibert first heard about the Adamant project almost 20 years ago (during its planning stages) from Linda De Zitter, a clinical psychologist he met while making *Every Little Thing*, who is one of the centre's co-founders. "The former day centre was, as often, highly unsuitable, so the head of Paris's Central Psychiatric Group wanted to build something new. They brought together patients, staff and architects for discussions and eventually the dream became reality, with the Adamant opening in 2010. I was first there eight years ago when I was invited to talk about my work – they often invite guest writers, philosophers, curators and so on. Most psychiatric institutions are very enclosed, but the Adamant is unusually open: people come and go as they want, and can go into any room for whatever workshop, discussion or activity they're interested in.

'They told me, "We may be crazy but we're not idiots. We'll help you become more confident while filming." I learned from that and no longer tried to protect myself by keeping a distance'

ABOVE
The day centre in *On the Adamant*

OPPOSITE
Director Nicolas Philibert

"The proximity to water is important, making it a peaceful place for the patients, carers, everyone. When I was filming, the atmosphere usually felt very calm, whereas going home across Paris I'd be struck by the cars, noise and aggressive behaviour... which shows that the craziest people aren't always where we think they are. The Adamant, conversely, offers a culture of respect; people make a real effort to listen to others."

That's true, too, of the film. Philibert's empathetic sensitivity to the vulnerable was immediately evident in *Every Little Thing*, but he says his approach for this film was different. "When I began work on the earlier film, I had many scruples – 'Mental illness isn't a show!' – so I held back. But some people at La Borde told me, 'We may be crazy but we're not idiots. We'll help you become more confident while filming; don't be so afraid of working with us.' I learned from that, and this time I no longer tried to protect myself by keeping a distance."

Philibert has always made sure to spend sufficient time with his subjects before filming starts to create an atmosphere of mutual trust. This time, however, once shooting started, his strategy differed from that taken at La Borde. "For *Every Little Thing*, I needed a structure before starting, so I decided to follow the progress of the play they were rehearsing; that was my crutch. But here I abandoned any idea of a pre-existing structure and decided to improvise as much as possible, responding to the micro-events of daily life. Making myself available that way ensured proper encounters with people. After all, it's a

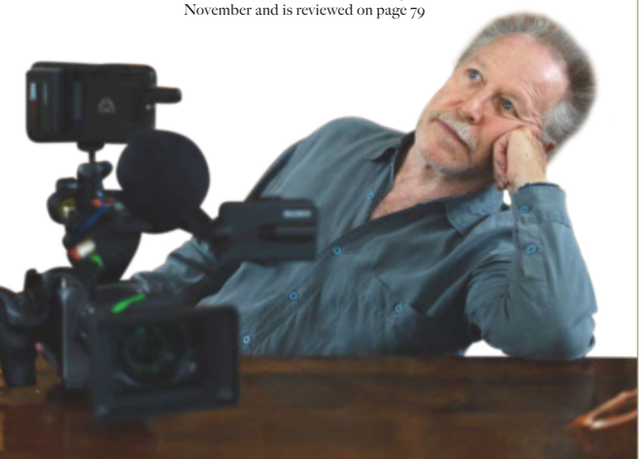
film about our shared humanity. I make my films from my ignorance, my desire to learn more about the world, about the mysteries of the mind, and about myself: who I am and what I'm doing here. You said watching the film made you feel, 'I could easily be like that person.' I certainly felt the same."

Despite being shot over seven months in 2021, when Covid necessitated masks and other precautions, the film is notable for its sense of a collective spirit – a concept central to the Adamant project – and its gentle intimacy. Even more memorable than some day visitors performing songs or discussing their paintings (creativity is clearly encouraged) are the moments when individuals open up to camera about their "madness"; their fears, anxieties, beliefs or inner voices. "What some people have in their heads is a real hell. But many are also highly intelligent. One, for instance, writes, composes and knows an amazing amount about filmmakers, writers, musicians and artists. But he also believes that many of those artists' works are all about him and his family. Even so, those delusions can have their own strange logic.

"These patients are hypersensitive to the violence in the world; it's a kind of lucidity. They don't have the defence strategies that 'normal' people use to protect themselves. Their communicative link with the world has been damaged, so the Adamant's carers try with each person to repair that link. Doing that, it's important to remember that while they're ill, they're not only ill. Firstly, they are people. Many psychiatric institutions don't want to deal with more than their illness, but on the Adamant and at La Borde, the carers see them as individuals in their own right, who enjoy music, drawing or a walk in a forest. So they try to help them rebuild a link not only with others but with themselves."

Clearly, the Adamant is a cherishable rarity. Happily, this film kicks off a triptych; the second and third movies, already largely shot and partly edited, will centre, respectively, on conversations between carers and patients, and on the former visiting the homes of the latter. Improvisation still rules. "It's like I'm saying to the viewer, 'Look, that boat looks like it could be interesting. Come take a look and let's see what we find.'"

On the Adamant is released in UK cinemas and on Curzon Home Cinema on 3 November and is reviewed on page 79



THE BALLOT OF...

C.J. 'Fiery' Obasi

Each month we highlight a voter in our Greatest Films of All Time poll. Here the Nigerian director of *Ojuju* and the upcoming *Mami Wata* shares his choices

GOODFELLAS (MARTIN SCORSESE, 1990)
For me it's just a perfect film – pure art, yet very accessible, with unforgettable scenes and dialogue, and what cinematography!

THE SEVENTH SEAL (INGMAR BERGMAN, 1957)
I saw an English-dubbed version as a kid, so for the longest time I didn't know it was a Swedish film. But the images still haunted me.

TAXI DRIVER (MARTIN SCORSESE, 1976)
Scorsese couldn't be touched at this point, and *Taxi Driver* is a pure example of that.

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (GEORGE ROMERO, 1968)
Watching the movie now, you may not agree with my selection, but once you remember that Romero did what he did in 1968, then it hits you just how crazy and groundbreaking *Night of the Living Dead* is.

RAGING BULL (MARTIN SCORSESE, 1980)
Again, Martin Scorsese. I remember reading a quote by Brian De Palma, where he mentioned finishing post on *Scarface* [1983] and feeling really good about it. Then he decided to go and watch *Raging Bull* in the theatre. When the movie starts and he sees the opening scene, with De Niro bouncing in the foggy ring in slow motion, he immediately feels deflated and shitty about his movie. He concluded: "No matter how good you are, there's always Scorsese."

Brian De Palma mentioned finishing post on *Scarface* and feeling really good about it. Then he decided to go and watch *Raging Bull* in the theatre

SEVEN SAMURAI (KUROSAWA AKIRA, 1954)
A masterclass in filmmaking.

TOUKI BOUKI (DJIBRIL DIOP MAMBÉTY, 1973)
Bold and visionary. It takes your expectations of African cinema and throws them out the window.

CITY OF GOD (KÁTIA LUND & FERNANDO MEIRELLES, 2002)
People still don't appreciate what Lund/Meirelles did in *City of God*. I mean, they do. But not really.

THE EXORCIST (WILLIAM FRIEDKIN, 1973)
Still nothing like it.

YEELEN (SOULEYMANE CISSÉ, 1987)
My favourite movie of ALL TIME. The fact that it never makes the top ten movies list is heartbreaking. It's not one of the best African films of all time, it is one of the best *films* of all time!

Mami Wata is released in UK cinemas on 17 November. See ayafilms.org

ABOVE *City of God* (2002)

ABOVE Miyazaki Hayao's *The Boy and the Heron*

FESTIVAL

TORONTO

BY ADAM NAYMAN

Even as the actors' strike ground on, there was no shortage of stars to walk the red carpets

Covering a film festival on your own turf can be a discombobulating experience, especially when you keep seeing your hometown on screen. The city known colloquially as Hollywood North played itself on several occasions at this year's Toronto International Film Festival (Tiff), whether as the background to backstage dramas in Atom Egoyan's *Seven Veils* and Chelsea McMullan's *Swan Song* (both shot largely in the steel-and-glass expanse of the chic Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts), or as the urban labyrinth stymieing the protagonist of M.H. Murray's empathetic debut *I Don't Know Who You Are*. But Toronto also showed up in disguise in Kristoffer Borgli's absurdist horror *Dream Scenario*, whose high-concept premise about a college professor waywardly surfing the astral plane was rendered all the stranger – at least for locals like me – by seeing a nebbishy Nicolas Cage skulking through familiar neighbourhoods and haunts: an icon in our midst.

In reality, Cage was one of a handful of American A-listers who made the journey, liberated from the demands (if not the ethics) of the Sag-Aftra standoff by a series of promotional waivers. Of these glamorous visitors, the majority were attending as directors, including honorary Torontonian Viggo Mortensen – who brought seemingly every member of the Canadian crew of his romantic western *The Dead Don't Hurt* on stage for its premiere – and Ethan Hawke, who, following a spate of cancelled flights, had to board a Greyhound coach in order to make his own screening of the Flannery O'Connor biopic *Wildcat*. The question of what a film festival as industry-oriented as Toronto's would look like devoid of stars was thus not quite answered, while other, even more existential ones were raised – such as whether a filmmaker like Shawn Levy could truly be said, as Tiff VIP Taika Waititi put it, to have "resisted the comfort of sameness" throughout his career, given that he's directed three *Night at the Museum* films.

Levy was on hand to present his Netflix series based on Anthony Doerr's 2014 war novel *All the Light We Cannot See*. Netflix had a number of other high-profile titles at Tiff, including Chloe Domont's feature debut *Fair Play* (reviewed on page 72), set in the world of hedge-fund management and sold to the streaming giant at Sundance for £16.5 million (almost as much as Apple lavished on the Oscar-grabbing *CODA* in 2021). *Fair Play* is a satisfyingly serrated relationship study that pairs Phoebe Dynevor and Alden Ehrenreich as workplace lovers whose dreams of intertwined upward mobility are torn asunder by a mix of personal competitiveness and the spiritual malaise of late capitalism; smartly written and acted, it surfs the zeitgeist with finesse.

Where Domont strikes a confrontational tone, Canadian Molly McGlynn's second feature *Fitting In* drops the gauntlet more gently. After learning she's got a rare physical condition that will compromise her nascent sex life (and reproductive system), high-school sprinter Lindy (Maddie Ziegler) sets about trying to renovate her vagina, one angry inch at a time. Instead of subverting conventions, McGlynn tweaks them; the nicest touches are verbal and visual references to teen body-horror touchstones from *Carrie* (1976) to *Jennifer's Body* (2009), which remind us that the project's original title was *Bloody Hell*.

Alexander Payne's seriocomic 70s period piece *The Holdovers*, about a misanthropic history prof (Paul Giamatti) bonding with a defiant freshman (Dominic Sessa) over the course of a snowy Christmas holiday, is a male-bonding tearjerker so skilfully engineered that it could draw blood from a stone. Hailed by most critics as a return to form à la *Sideways* (2004), it ended up taking second place in the voting for Tiff's People's Choice Award. The winner was Cord Jefferson's literary satire *American Fiction*, which orbits an embittered writer (Jeffrey Wright) whose cynical attempt to write a terrible novel yields a bestseller.

While both *The Holdovers* and *American Fiction* seem destined for the sorts of awards-season glory the former desires and the latter satirises, the other top vote-getter in the People's Choice Award, Miyazaki Hayao's *The Boy and the Heron*, has the sort of enduring imagination and beauty that transcends such concerns altogether. A bucolic post-war film set in Japan, it creates an endlessly regenerative fantasy world crammed with allusions to its maker's oeuvre. The film is funny, surprising, rueful and, finally, humble in the face of the cosmos – an anxious but hopeful allegory of inheritance.

NATURAL HISTORY

19. Mutt movies

BY ISABEL STEVENS

In Disney's *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (1961) wide-eyed pups sit around a TV, cheering on Rin-Tin-Tin-like hound hero Thunderbolt. Is that ludicrous? Can dogs appreciate films? Even 110 years ago, Norwegian painter and film fan Edvard Munch thought so. If his dog barked during a film, Munch would interpret it as a sign he was no longer enjoying it and they would leave the cinema.

Munch would no doubt have approved of fellow Scandinavian Aki Kaurismäki's Kino Laika. Named after the Soviet stray blasted into space in 1957 and the Finnish filmmaker's own shaggy black German Shepherd cross, who played Baudelaire in *La Vie de bohème* (1992), his new dog-friendly community-built cinema serves the small Helsinki satellite town of Karkkila. There, concessions include non-alcoholic dog-beer, served in specially designed Laika bowls.

Given rising dog ownership and flagging ticket sales, it's natural for British cinemas to try out dog-friendly screenings: Picturehouse has done so since 2015 and Curzon recently used the sweary dog comedy *Strays* as a launchpad for its own series (house rule: "owners are required to clean up after their own dogs if they create a mess").

What do dogs, who see only in shades of blue and yellow, get out of this? According to canine cognition expert Alexandra Horowitz in her 2009 book *Inside of a Dog*, a little too much: the canine eye perceives the world at a faster rate, taking in 70 or 80 still images every second rather than the 60 of the human eye. Movies, shot at 24 frames a second, don't fool them – they don't move fast enough for dog vision. Dogs see the illusion behind cinema: a flickering image with black moments between frames.

However, a study of dog brains at Emory University in Atlanta suggests that a canine cinema may not be so ridiculous. Two dogs were trained to stay still in an fMRI scanner while they watched 30-minute videos of dog-related activities (being petted, receiving treats) shot from a dog's POV. The neural results revealed that while humans are object-oriented, dogs respond much more to action. That helps explain Munch and his mutt's favourite star: Charlie Chaplin.

LYING DOGGO
One Hundred and One Dalmatians (1961)

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Retrospective

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Retrospective

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MEAN SHEETS

Monsieur Allard's design for Godard makes sure the bombshell steals the show

BY THOMAS FLEW

Sixty years ago, G. Allard (his first name was Gilbert, but he was often credited as Georges) created one of the French New Wave's most beloved posters, for Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963). Referencing the film's opening scene – which famously featured a nude Brigitte Bardot at its producer's insistence – it also gives B.B. top billing, above her co-stars and director, and in a larger font to boot. It's clear what was expected to bring the punters in and it wasn't Godard's self-reflective exploration of ennui in European filmmaking.

This was one of dozens of posters Allard designed for the agency Publicité Jacques Fourastié throughout the 1950s and 60s; most follow a traditional format, with the film's most bankable star looming large, but others are more playful, as with the design for 1959's *Horrors of the Black Museum* (below, middle). The *Le Mépris* poster is simple but elegant; Bardot's hair becomes less distinct as it cascades, with an unfinished-appearing background giving it an effervescent casualness.

When researching this column, I was surprised by how little biographical information is available on Allard – a forgotten figure, survived by the artwork he created. That's the nature of agency work, perhaps, but if directors working within the constraints of the Hollywood studio system's Golden Age can be hailed as geniuses for the ways that their work broke free of business-minded limitations, why shouldn't poster artists be lauded in the same way?

Pierre Koralnik's *Cannabis* (1970)

Arthur Crabtree's *Horrors of the Black Museum* (1959)

Marcel Camus's *Black Orpheus* (1959)

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A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

There's a paradox at the heart of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), exemplarily identified in David Meeker's reminiscence of the day he took his new print of the film to its director ('A print odyssey', *S&S*, September). Meeker shows Kubrick (on set, above) to have been obsessed with technical details to such an extent that he was willing to annihilate the film print for the sake of a green shade in a green room.

In working on the film, Kubrick went to great lengths to get the technology right, even if there were some errors – the incomplete spinning space station being one – so this obsession with the technical shouldn't be a surprise. Presumably, we are meant to marvel at this perfectionism; but the paradox is that such a focus on the technical is aligned with a film that is determinedly anti-technology.

All technology is murder for Kubrick. From the moment the apeman picks up the bone and wields it as a weapon to the moment when Bowman 'lobotomises' HAL 9000, the purpose of technology is to kill. The main killer in the film is HAL, the supreme example of human technology, killing four men because it was unable to admit that it had made a mistake.

But here another aspect of the paradox arises. It is made clear, in the way that Kubrick cuts from the apeman in the field of bones to a shot of the monolith aligned with the moon, the sun and the stars beyond, and then back to the apeman, that the impulse to kill is implanted by the aliens which had created the monolith.

Kubrick's montage suggests that it is the alien intelligence that directs the apeman into its human technological phase. The bone is the human being's first technological instrument but, instead of the complexity of a recursive theory of technological and human development, such as Ernst Kapp delineated in his *Elements of a Philosophy of Technology* (1877), we get a mash-up of two pseudosciences – Erich von Däniken's alien visitation theories and intelligent design – which effectively lets human beings off the hook, making the impulse to technology and murder an alien imposition (although Kubrick himself does not seem to recognise this).

The vision of human triumphalism at the first killing gives way to an arid perspective on human beings, exemplified by the way the actors are reduced to being little more than part of the decor, with far less purchase on Kubrick's attention than the colour of the walls in the hotel room beyond infinity. We can only escape from our wretched human condition, from the technological prison we have built on murder, by repudiating that very same technology, with alien help once again, as a new being is born from the putrefaction of the old. For Kubrick, human spiritual progress begins with a bone and ends with a baby, but by positing a first cause we always end up with a figure of the divine that denigrates the human, a trajectory that he refuses to move away from.

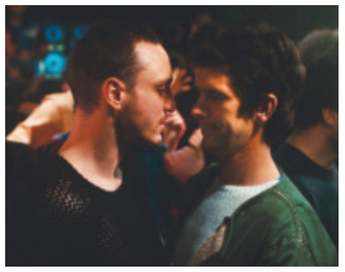
Dr Russell Davies, Raynes Park, London

The actors are reduced to being little more than part of the decor, with far less purchase on Kubrick's attention than the colour of the walls in the hotel room beyond infinity

DICKS DASTARDLY

Commentators have focused on the explicit sex in Ira Sachs's film *Passages* (*S&S*, October 2023). For me, however, the abiding impression was of the age-old story, familiar to women, of how silly and annoying men are when they keep their brains in their dicks. The only good thing going for Tomas (Franz Rogowski, below with Ben Whishaw) is that he has, we're told, made an excellent film: shame that wasn't the one we saw. (Good acting throughout, though.) Also, since Tomas wasn't using a condom, Agathe was at grave risk of getting thrush as well as pregnant.

Audrey Mullender, via email



Roger and Derek Young were always calm, always professional, always a source of support, even when films didn't turn up

YOUNG LOVE

Roger and Derek Young (Reel Talk, *S&S*, October) didn't only screen for the great and the good. They were also an integral part of the evening classes held at the BFI over many years in the 80s and 90s, always calm, always professional, always a source of support to the tutors even when the films didn't turn up on time or the discussion ran on too long. Many of those who went on to teach and write about film, television and media owe them a debt of gratitude even though they never saw the twins out of the box.

Best wishes to them on their retirement.

Christine Geraghty, emeritus professor, University of Glasgow; honorary research fellow, Birkbeck College

THE LOST PICTURE SHOW

Unlike Thomas Flew ('The happy return of EIFF', *S&S*, September), I find it hard to get excited about the Edinburgh International Film Festival – it is a pointless bauble in a city that has lost its only cinematheque.

Filmhouse provided Edinburgh's residents with year-round access to cultural cinema, ran education and outreach programmes, and hosted a variety of other film festivals and events, and now it is gone. Resurrecting EIFF is scant consolation for the city's cinephiles: it's a few days of films scheduled at the same time as the International, Fringe, Book and Art Festivals, because in Edinburgh culture is something that is only allowed to happen in August when the city is at its most overcrowded and overpriced.

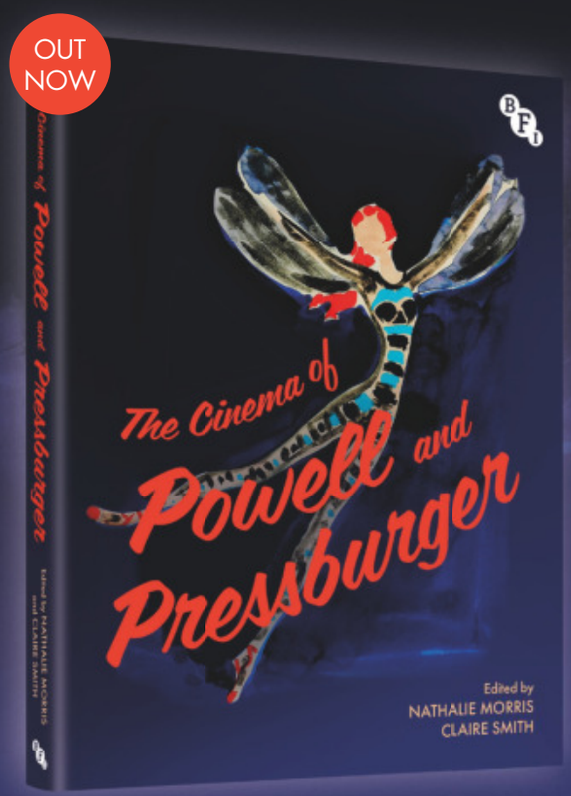
Jack Aubrey, via email

COLOUR CORRECTION

In his excellent review of Pat Jackson's *Western Approaches* (*S&S*, September), Robert Hanks states it was shot in colour, and that the only other feature-length colour films released during the war were *The Thief of Baghdad* (1940), *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) and Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* (1944). This is not so: David Lean's *This Happy Breed* (1944) and *Blithe Spirit* (released before the end of the war in 1945, and featuring Margaret Rutherford, right) were both photographed in Technicolor by Ronald Neame.

Another credit for both films was the omnipresent Natalie Kalmus, Technicolor's colour director – her name and role were seen slightly larger than all the other names listed. Also, quite unusually, though not surprisingly in this particular case, the final credit to be seen before *Blithe Spirit* started was for 'Noël Coward, Producer'. The credit for the director, David Lean, preceded this, in honour, presumably, of the Master.

Michael Hudson, via email



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THE LONG TAKE

Pamela Hutchinson
@PamHutch

A rediscovered fragment of the lost 1917 *Cleopatra* reveals Hollywood excess at its finest

Every scrap of film discovered in a loft or flea market is precious, to someone, for some reason. But some fragments of film, nitrate or otherwise, have the capacity to set the internet aflame. Young British researcher James Fennell recently hit the jackpot when he bought a toy projector on eBay. The projector was sold with some portions of film, including one 40-second strip of one of the most sought-after lost films of all time.

Cleopatra, directed by J. Gordon Edwards for the Fox studio in 1917, was one of the most lavish blockbusters to emerge from the early Hollywood years. At a cost of around $500,000 – with extravagant sets and more than 5,000 extras, not to mention members of the Denishawn dancing troupe, a reported 2,000-strong crew and a menagerie of animals – this was Hollywood excess at its finest. The costume budget was also vast, including 50 changes of outfit for the leading lady, who naturally played the titular queen.

That leading lady was the American siren Theda Bara. Fans well knew that she was Theodosia Goodman from Ohio, but they preferred her screen persona, a haughty, hot-tempered and seductive 'vampire', with a far-fetched pseudonym that the studio boasted was an anagram of 'Arab death'. The publicists also claimed variously that her father was a sheikh or an Italian artist, that her mother was a French actress, that she was raised in the Sahara, or Paris. But no one really believed any of that. Hers was the pale face, surrounded by a curtain of black curls, with piercing eyes etched in kohl pencil, that accompanied the notorious intertitle "Kiss me, my fool" in *A Fool There Was* (Frank Powell, 1915). That's when she assumed the title of vamp, short for vampire – a dangerous, highly exoticised woman who weakens men by dominating them sexually.

It won't surprise you to learn that many of Bara's 50 costumes for *Cleopatra* left little to the imagination: confections of embroidery, beadwork and silk drew attention to her figure in the most direct way, with strings of pearls or gilded snakes circling her bosoms and sheer fabrics draped over her legs. As the *New York Times* reported, many of them were "so thoroughly in attune with the period that they are likely to cause not a little comment".

ABOVE
Theda Bara as the Queen of the Nile in the lost 1917 film *Cleopatra*

Fashions changed, and Hollywood became more prudish. *Cleopatra* fell out of favour, before being lost – the last known prints were destroyed in a fire in 1937

Between the grandeur of the film's spectacle and Bara's heady allure, *Cleopatra* was a hit, but the censors took exception to the film's risqué side. Even at the height of its triumph, the film was hacked about with. But worse was to come. Fashions changed, and Hollywood became more prudish. *Cleopatra* fell out of favour, before being lost for good – the last known prints were destroyed in the notorious Fox vault fire of 1937, just three years after Claudette Colbert played the role for Cecil B. DeMille's similarly extravagant, provocative adaptation for Paramount. Much as Cleopatra recklessly dissolved a pearl in vinegar to impress Antony, Fox, it seemed, had poured money into a film destined to go up in smoke. Nitrate film is far more volatile than a pearl, but even if it doesn't burn, it can easily succumb to a form of decay known as vinegar syndrome.

That begins to explain why these 40 seconds or so from the film are so exciting. For decades we've been able merely to conjure a hazy vision of *Cleopatra*: stills from the film show Bara in a selection of those outrageous ensembles, reclining on pillows and furs, staring into the camera, her expression a mixture of come-hither smoulder and haughty contempt. In 1958, Richard Avedon shot Marilyn Monroe in a replica outfit for *Life* magazine. A ten-second fragment of the film has emerged previously, in which Bara brandishes a dagger in a state of undress. Film historian Philip Dye created a video reconstruction of the movie based on the stills and this clip alone. Props and costumes exist: Cleopatra's pearl breastplate is currently on display at the V&A Museum in London, as part of the 'Diva' exhibition, and her throne was saved, but its whereabouts are unknown. The paper archive is solid, with pages and pages of publicity materials and press coverage. If you had deep pockets, and could persuade a few private collectors to be generous, perhaps you could stock a small *Cleopatra* museum – you just wouldn't be able to screen the film.

Now, though, we have a sense of *Cleopatra* as a movie. The newly found fragment has been scanned and posted on YouTube. We can only hope it will be properly preserved. It cuts rapidly between Cleopatra in her palace and an army racing to battle. There's narrative, emotion and a sense of the scale of the picture. This fragment shows a clear image of Bara's anguished performance, of the California sunshine illuminating the lavish decor, the palm trees swaying in the breeze and dust rising from the road under marching feet and galloping horses. The film is suddenly alive, and breathing. It's more than anyone living has ever seen of it, and its attractions are as immediate as they would have been more than a century ago. *Cleopatra* was clearly a beautiful film. Every scrap of film is precious, even if it leaves us craving more.

Pamela Hutchinson is a freelance critic and film historian

IMAGE: BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE; BYLINE ILLUSTRATIONS: PETER ARKLE

Andrew Male
@Andr6wMale

The pervasive malevolence in *Evil* makes even Friedkin's take on demonic forces seem optimistic

Revisiting William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973) recently, I realised two things. First, I hadn't seen the film since I was a teenager, when I viewed it on a rented VHS at my friend Neil's house. Second, and perhaps most importantly, I'd never watched the first 40 minutes, as Neil had insisted we "skip the boring bits" and played the video from when Regan (Linda Blair) comes down from her bedroom to join her mother's cocktail party and informs astronaut Bill Cutshaw (Dick Callinan): "You're gonna die up there."

This meant I'd never experienced just how slowly and carefully Friedkin establishes a sense of discord and unease in sound and image, creating a link between the discovery of the stone amulet of Pazuzu in northern Iraq and the unleashing of something evil in upper-middle-class America. For in Friedkin's *mise en scène* and the often jarring sound design, it's suggested that this malevolent force isn't merely confined to Regan's bedroom – it's something far greater and more powerful. This unsettling feeling has been missing from a lot of recent modern horror films, such as *Talk to Me* and *Evil Dead Rise*, which confine those dark forces to a specific group of individuals or a limited architectural space. In *The Exorcist*, evil is a vast and unstoppable force in the world. In fact, with a few exceptions in cinema, the best current model for such a grim vision can be found in a CBS/Paramount procedural called *Evil* (2019-), written by Robert and Michelle King, the husband-and-wife showrunners who created the hit legal dramas *The Good Wife* (2009-16) and *The Good Fight* (2017-22).

At first glance, *Evil* is a perfect example of meticulously engineered modern network TV. Katja Herbers plays Dr Kristen Bouchard, a forensic psychologist, lapsed Catholic and frazzled mother of four young girls who is hired by priest-in-training David Acosta (Mike Colter) to help investigate supposedly supernatural incidents and recommend whether an exorcism or psychiatric evaluation is required. They are assisted by Ben Shakir (Aasif Mandvi), a tech and science whiz who has no truck with either psychiatry or the supernatural and is always looking for rational scientific explanations behind the phenomena. Every week they investigate some supposed supernatural event, and every week some sort of explanation is found. Neat, right? It's *Elementary* (2012-19) meets *The Exorcist* meets *The X-Files* (1993-2002). Yet, as in Friedkin's film, and many of the best episodes of *The X-Files*, there is something in *Evil* that slips the bounds of the conventional network TV procedural – something that unnerves and disturbs in a way no piece of formula TV ever should.

That's partly down to the show's two other main performers, Michael Emerson and Christine Lahti. Emerson plays Leland Townsend, a tweedy rival psychologist and master manipulator who, we gradually discover, is involved in the dark arts and is behind the majority of the series' sinister goings-on, from stalking Kristen's children in internet chatrooms to convincing a patient to join an incel help group and go on a killing spree. Lahti, meanwhile, is magnificent as Kristen's mother, Sheryl, who starts dating Townsend, and gradually begins to feel more empowered as she moves over to the dark side.

Robert King is a practising Catholic, Michelle King an agnostic Jew. They've both said the show grew out of debates they had concerning the rise of evil and deceit in the modern world – in politics, on social media – and how it might be stopped. As such, each episode moves along parallel tracks: one where there is a logical explanation for everything and hope is a vital and necessary force, and one where something beyond the rational is taking place, and the sense of something unholy – never confined to just one case or one household – is vast, ever-present and potentially unstoppable.

In fact, it could be argued that over three seasons, the lure of the dark side has come to romance the Kings themselves. Incorporating ideas from urban legends and online 'creepypasta' tales – plus a terrifying *Rosemary's Baby*-style subplot concerning a fertility clinic and one of Kristen's frozen eggs – Season 3 was the most disturbing yet, as the forces of evil simultaneously moved out into the world and deep into Kristen's home, threatening her children and their future. Where is the hope?

In *Evil*, as with most modern horror films, hope lies with resolution – but resolution, of course, is the enemy of the network procedural

As with most modern horror films, hope lies with resolution – but resolution, of course, is the enemy of the network procedural. While there may be self-contained stories that are solved every week, the central theme must abide. And when the central theme of your show is the power and persistence of a demonic evil, lack of resolution is a concept some viewers may find hard to accept. They might be tempted to look for moral lessons instead, but even there, the Kings are refusing to play the network game.

"People are looking for lessons [in the show]," Robert King has said. "The lesson is that sometimes there's something perverse that you can't get your arms quite around. At the end of an episode you'll be disturbed and you're not quite sure what the show was trying to tell you. Maybe that's the point. Maybe that's what the show was trying to tell you."

No moral, no lesson, no resolution, no end. Not even *The Exorcist* was that bleak.

Evil is available to stream on Now TV now

Andrew Male is a freelance critic who lives in South London

ILLUSTRATION BY MARC DAVID SPENGLER

POLL POSITION

Kevin B. Lee
@ alsolikelife

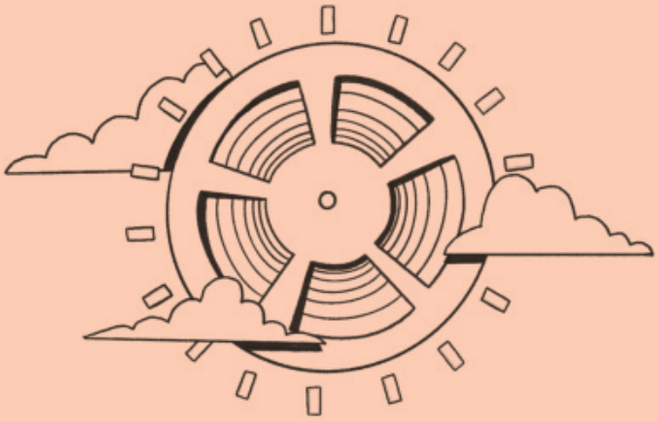
As environmental concerns grow more intense, it's time we formed a sustainable cinematic canon

In my last column, I proposed a contemporary film studies curriculum based on the top ten films in *Sight and Sound*'s 2022 Greatest Films of All Time poll. While writing it, I considered *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) – which placed tenth – in the context of the present climate crisis. This notion was inspired by scholar Hunter Vaughan's essay '500,000 Kilowatts of Stardust: An Eco-Materalist Reading of *Singin' in the Rain*', which reframes the musical as an outdated paean to Hollywood's systematic exploitation of natural resources. Clearly the film wouldn't make Vaughan's all-time top ten, but how many *S&S* voters, and how much of film culture at large, might be shaken over the next decade by the growing menace of environmental calamity?

If last year's results marked voters' reckoning with the era of equality, diversity and inclusion, equally pertinent issues of ecological sustainability seemed less prevalent. This may be attributed to a lack of eco-themed films with canonical status, or to the perhaps related fact that ecological film studies are less established than fields focusing on race, gender and sexuality. Nonetheless, ecocinema may well advance amid a growing number of climate-related disasters. When I summarised Vaughan's argument to a critic who had put *Singin' in the Rain* in her own top ten, her response passed from outrage to bemusement to agreement within minutes – a rapid renegotiation of cinematic legacies in the face of looming planetary realities.

If ecocinema is waiting in the wings to straddle the film canon, what would be its *Jeanne Dielman* (1975)? Looking at the present top 100, I can find no better candidate than Agnès Varda's *The Gleaners and I* (2000). For Varda, ecoconsciousness not only serves as virtuous subject matter, but ingeniously articulates a practice for both art and living. Her early adoption of handheld digital cameras enables a cinema that opens our eyes to everyday beauty, appropriating the practices of scavengers and recyclers for an ecocinematic avant garde.

One might assume that a selection of ecofilms from the list would be littered with documentaries, but of the six other nonfiction titles in the top 100, the only other compelling candidate is Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98). Perhaps this betrays my own predilection for seeing the video essay as an ecocinematic practice that recycles existing media to make greater use of their intellectual and aesthetic properties. Godard's four-and-a-half-hour odyssey attests to the infinitely renewable nature of re-viewing and remixing the cinematic archive.



Resourcefulness with limited means has long been a hallmark of experimental filmmaking, as found among the regrettably few avant-garde titles that made the list. Utilising montage techniques as impressive as Godard's, Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) brings a series of still photos to cinematic life. And if Godard turns his film collection into an ever-expanding universe, Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) focuses intensely on a single location: a small southern California home that unwinds into an endless dance between states of being.

My remaining candidates for a 'sustainable' *S&S* top ten include fiction films that reflect ecocinema to varying degrees, either in subject matter or production practice. Even if it doesn't evince ecological themes on screen, a film such as Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) exemplifies a minimalist world-making approach, while *Jeanne Dielman* could rank as an ecofeminist landmark in both subject and method. Reflecting on its tragic heroine's life of obsessive, ritualised frugality, which the film's austere form examines with a profound critical empathy, one thinks of how much the social roles and moral responsibilities of maintaining sustainable living practices have fallen upon women and marginalised peoples (as further evidenced by films such as *Killer of Sheep*, 1978, and *Daughters of the Dust*, 1991).

If last year's poll results marked voters' reckoning with the era of equality, diversity and inclusion, equally pertinent issues of ecological sustainability seemed less prevalent

One can also make a case for films like *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966), a work that brings us nearer to the animal world than any other on the list; or even *Do the Right Thing* (1989), which appears frequently in ecocinema syllabi: to what extent is its depiction of social unrest informed by global warming? *Stalker* (1979) may be one of the most breathtaking explorations of an apocalyptic wasteland, made all the more poignant by the likelihood that the eventual death of director Andrei Tarkovsky and other crew members resulted from exposure to toxic chemicals on location. On the other hand, Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* (1966) features perhaps the most explicit and disturbing exploitation of an animal in any film in the top 100 – a horse shot in the neck, pushed down a flight of stairs and then stabbed (though Tarkovsky insisted that the horse was dispatched humanely and that the cinematic ends justified the means).

Such methods are bound to receive greater scrutiny in the coming years, as established masterpieces are subjected to an emerging set of ethics connecting filmic and planetary realities. The jungle destruction, animal slaughter and exploitation of Filipino labourers in *Apocalypse Now* (1979); the elaborate sets of sci-fi masterpieces such as *Blade Runner* (1982); and, yes, the extravagant use of public water and electricity in filming *Singin' in the Rain* – such practices have had their day. One may object that the films I've designated as heralding a turn to the ecocinematic seem too collectively modest, even austere, given all the spectacular splendours that movies can offer. But just as a century of patriarchal and colonialist elements in cinema have been starkly reconsidered in the past decade, a similar reckoning may be coming for unsustainable practices in moviemaking.

Kevin B. Lee is Locarno Film Festival professor for the future of cinema at USI

ILLUSTRATION BY BETH WALROND

Nicole Flattery
@nicoleflattery

In the slippery worlds of Bret Easton Ellis and Paul Schrader, beauty betrays as much as it beguiles

"The impact *American Gigolo* [1980] had on me is now impossible to tally. It's not as if *American Gigolo* is a great film – it is not. Its writer and director Paul Schrader would agree with me on that. But it changed the way we look at and objectify men, and it altered how I look at Los Angeles. Its influence is huge and undeniable."

This quote, from Ellis's podcast in 2016, is him speaking to Schrader. Until recently, I hadn't read any Ellis since I was in my late teens. He's a writer that you find in college, and his youthful alienation meets your youthful alienation. I'd read, in quick succession, *Less than Zero* (published in 1985 when he was only 21 and still at Bennington, a private liberal arts college in Vermont), *The Rules of Attraction* (1987) and *American Psycho* (1991), the savage yuppie satire largely considered his masterpiece. These novels left me feeling grimy, sleazy, empty and cold; they were trashy, and I was a little too young to realise that trash was the point. I'm reassessing Ellis's work because I recently read *The Shards*, published earlier this year. To read him with adult eyes is to be surprised by a depth of feeling you didn't realise was actually there; his portrayal of closeted men's yearning and his understanding of the disorienting effects of beauty are possibly unparalleled. And to know Ellis, you have to watch *American Gigolo*.

The Shards is a murder-mystery set in the elite Buckley School in Los Angeles (which Ellis attended) and centres on a 17-year-old aspiring writer called Bret (well, he's never been subtle). He's surrounded by wealth, beauty and temptation. He has a gorgeous girlfriend (sex appeal is everything in Ellis's work, his characters are often defined by how much they are *wanted*), but he has a number of covert sexual encounters with a variety of male American jock types. Their perfect bodies are lovingly described. Only a flawless body or face can shake you from Valium-induced numbness; only the possibility of sex can ripple your untouchable surface.

There's a serial killer on the loose called The Trawler, and Bret suspects the new and mysterious addition to their group, Robert Mallory. Of course, the first place he sees Robert is at the movies. Bret is a budding cineaste, and the moviehouses of Los Angeles are where he is spiritually nourished: "Movies were a religion in that moment, they could change you, alter your perception, you could rise towards the screen and share a moment of transcendence, all your disappointments and fears would be wiped away for a few hours in that church."

One of the movies that defines the fictional Bret in *The Shards* is *American Gigolo*, Schrader's neo-noir about a male escort; in Bret's mind, Richard Gere as Julian lingers as a powerful erotic memory. When I rewatched the film, I realised how much it had fed Ellis: the pop music (Julian cruises around in a convertible to Blondie's 'Call Me'); the workout routines (the camera lingering on Gere's arms and rippling back); the attraction to appearances (Julian trying on shirts and ties, echoing behaviour we usually only see in female characters, to find the ideal, gentlemanly combination to seduce the lonely housewives of LA). But what most links Schrader and Ellis's work is the darkness underneath the clean and shimmering surfaces. The best scenes in *The Shards* have nothing to do with the tawdry killings, but are instead about the bewildering effect of encountering physical beauty.

In Bret Easton Ellis's novel *The Shards*, as in *American Gigolo*, status, swimming pools and designer labels mask only violence

BELOW
Richard Gere in Paul Schrader's *American Gigolo* (1980)

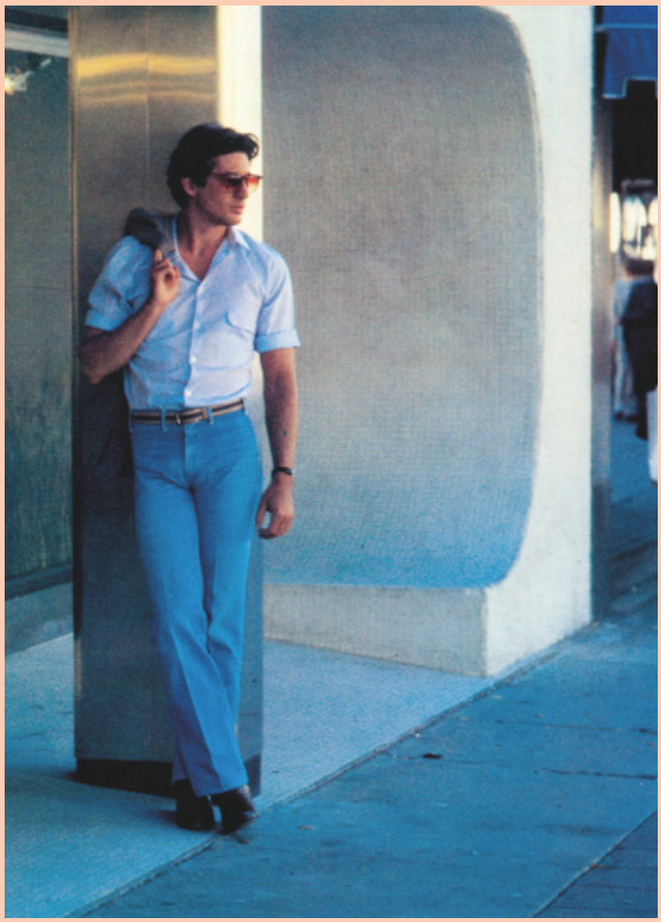


IMAGE: BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

Watch the first meeting between Michelle (Lauren Hutton) and Julian in *American Gigolo*. Beauty can drive you really crazy; it can make you do stupid, awful things. And it can invite terrible people into your life. In *The Shards*, Bret's girlfriend's father, Teddy, a powerful Hollywood producer, invites Bret for lunch at a glamorous spot, maybe Ma Maison, or one of those names Bret drops so fluently. They are ostensibly meeting about Bret's screenplay, but nobody, not even Bret, believes that. He's young and vulnerable, but pretending to be cool (there is a tenderness in *The Shards* absent from Ellis's previous work; maybe age has softened him). Teddy is an animal of insatiable appetite. In this work, as in *American Gigolo*, status, swimming pools and designer labels mask only violence. It's telling that in a novel with several brutal murders, and animal decapitations, this is by far the most chilling scene. It's so good you wish Schrader would direct it.

In fact, *The Shards* is set to be adapted for HBO by Luca Guadagnino, who might be able to capture its blend of queasy horror and desire. And Schrader and Ellis have collaborated already on 2013's much maligned *The Canyons* (on his podcast, where he does little to endear himself, Ellis repeatedly refers to that film's star as "the trainwreck Lindsay Lohan", as if that's her full name). But I still love the image of a young Ellis going to a movie theatre and finding his world being rearranged by *American Gigolo*: everything falling into place as Julian speeds down an LA highway.

Nicole Flattery's novel 'Nothing Special' is published by Bloomsbury

BFI
CINEMA UNBOUND. THE CREATIVE WORLDS OF
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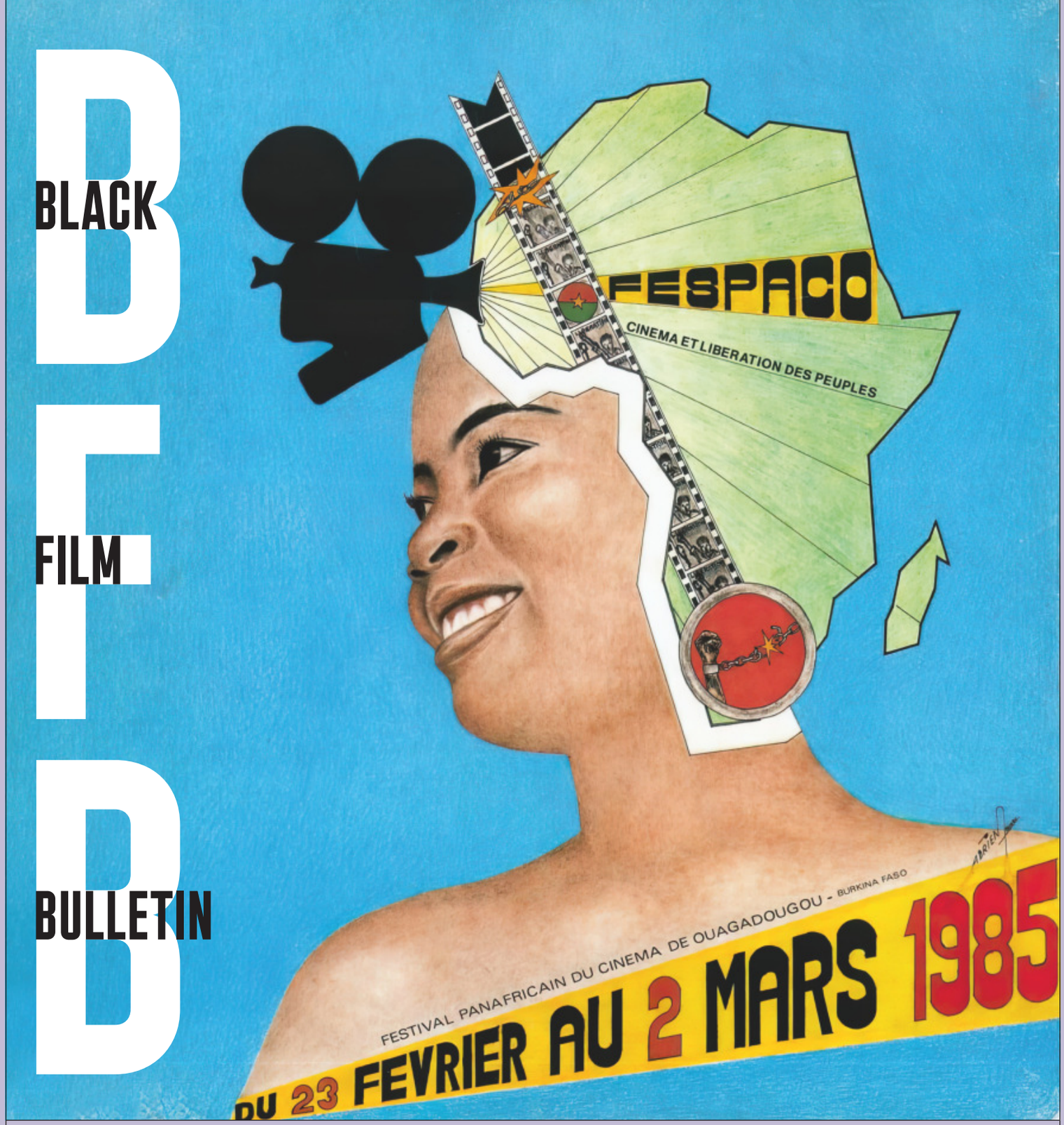
BLACK FILM BULLETIN



As *Black Film Bulletin*'s 30th anniversary year draws to a close, we reflect on the past and the promise of African cinema, and consider the legacies of key Black filmmaking legends

THE BFB EDITORS: DR JUNE GIVANNI, JAN ASANTE, MELANIE HOYES. @BLKFILMBULLETIN

We conclude *Black Film Bulletin*'s 30th year against a backdrop of writers' and actors' strikes in Hollywood, which have led to a mass production shutdown with wide-reaching global consequences. This precarious situation – which is, at the same time, a window of transformative possibility – has us musing on where the industry will be in another 30 years, as we contemplate the opportunities, or lack thereof, for Black British and diasporic voices to be seen and heard on UK screens.

Throughout the cultural interventions captured in the inaugural pages of *BFB* in 1993, 'legacy' and 'memory' serve as the constant refrains – and inspire each of the provocations that frame this anniversary edition. Nadia Denton delves into the past, present and future of the Festival Panafricain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou (Fespaco), which spotlights films made by and about Africans, and was memorialised at 'Fespaco and the Archiving of African Cinema', a panel curated and chaired by *BFB* co-founder Dr June Givanni at Raven Row gallery in London earlier this summer.

Also in this issue, we revisit Givanni's exhilarating 1993 interview with Arthur Jafa, a radical thinker and the acclaimed director of photography behind Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) and Spike Lee's *Crooklyn* (1994). Finally, with 2023 marking the birth centenary of Ousmane Sembène, the 'father of African cinema', the writer and filmmaker Tambay Obenson muses on the director's memory, Africa's untapped cinematic potential and the dawn of Akoroko – a digital-age movement rooted in efforts to preserve Africa's film heritage.

How will we reflect on the current period in 2053? Only time will tell.

Since its founding in 1969, the Festival Panafricain du Cinéma et de la Télévision de Ouagadougou – popularly known as Fespaco – has built a reputation as Africa's most important film festival. Earlier this year, a panel of key Fespaco contributors convened in London to honour the festival's legacy. Nadia Denton, the driving force behind the 'Beyond Nollywood' initiative, was present to capture the highlights

FESPACO: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

For over five decades, Fespaco has been the premier arena for reaffirming and celebrating Africa and its global diaspora on the big screen. Widely regarded as a site of pilgrimage among filmmakers and industry figures from the African diaspora, the Burkina Faso-based festival's cultural significance is due to its status as a truly pan-African space to discuss, debate and analyse the problems confronting modern African cinema. "Nowhere are so many African films shown at once; nowhere do so many African filmmakers ever come together," remarked the influential Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembène, a founding father of the festival, which, at its peak in the pre-Covid years, attracted more than 500,000 local and international spectators.

Government-organised since its inception, Fespaco has been beset with challenges over the last decade: problems with curation, event management, marketing and promotion have risked alienating festival-goers, threatening Fespaco's reputation as the greatest film festival on the African continent. Yet many still loyal to the pan-African ideals upon which the festival was founded continue to strive to restore it to its former glory. Among them is *Black Film Bulletin* founder and film archivist Dr June Givanni.

THE ARCHIVING OF AFRICAN CINEMA

In the summer of 2023, the June Givanni Pan African Cinema Archive enshrined the memory and legacy of Fespaco in an exhibition named 'PerAnkh', a showcase of the Archive's treasures, hosted at the Raven Row gallery in London. A series of events ran alongside the exhibition; of particular note was a panel discussion titled 'Fespaco and the Archiving of African Cinema', which assembled such African industry luminaries as the filmmakers Mohamed Challouf and Jihan El-Tahri and the curators Aboubakar Sanogo and Keith Shiri. Chaired by Givanni, the conversations recounted in dramatic detail the highs and lows of Fespaco, giving both personal and professional context to the history of the festival, which in recent times has drawn increasing criticism from the filmmaking community it set out to serve. The spirit of Fespaco was ever-present, with lively, provocative outbursts from panelists and audience members alike – "Fespacoesque", as El-Tahri put it.

El-Tahri, who is Egyptian, shed light on what made the 50-year-old festival so unique for African filmmakers, passionately describing it as "the only place where people from the Global South have their own space: we are not visitors there, we can talk together, there is a sense of safety – we are not being judged. We can be who we are in our different articulations, languages and aesthetics." Irrespective of its flaws, Fespaco still rivals many lauded Western festivals in the minds of film practitioners from the Global South.

Reflecting on Fespaco's intentions towards African filmmakers and the extent of its decolonial ambitions, El-Tahri remarked: "In the francophone African colonies, the 'image' was forbidden to the 'natives'. [These restrictive strategies existed in anglophone territories too, and were referred to as 'specialised technique'.] It was not until the early 1960s [albeit decades earlier in Egypt] that the idea of who we were as Africans was transmitted through our own eyes in dramatic feature films... we could represent and film ourselves. The way that external powers could control that space was by stopping the funding and distribution, and that was what Fespaco tried to break."

(R)EVOLUTION

In the 1990s, the festival began to encompass a younger generation of filmmakers, moving beyond the dominance of the old guard. "These founding fathers [such as Ousmane Sembène] were always there, but there was little engagement with the younger generation," recalled El-Tahri. "Then, in 1995, there was a movement to have a stronger voice from the second generation, and the Guild of African Filmmakers in the

ABOVE
On the red carpet at this year's Fespaco

OPPOSITE
A poster for a documentary about the revolutionary Thomas Sankara, who helped galvanise interest in the festival during his tenure as president of Burkina Faso in the 1980s

PHOTO BY OLYMPIA DE MAISMONT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Diaspora was created. Most of us rarely had our films shown in our own countries, and so a lot of African filmmakers who were part of the Guild were those making films that would compete internationally." To ensure it maintained its pivotal platform on the continent, Fespaco had to embrace changing demand.

Shiri, a UK-based curator originally from Zimbabwe, spoke of the importance of the grammar of African cinema and the fact that it arose from a revolutionary politics rooted and present in other forms of African artistic expression, such as the paintings of the Oshogbo school in south-west Nigeria and the music of Fela Kuti. Shiri insisted that such evolution occurs via cultural immersion in an African festival like Fespaco; knowledge of this underpins the loyalty many in the wider African film community have felt in standing by the event even during its more difficult phases.

The idea of Fespaco as a site of cultural exchange was expanded on by Sanogo, associate professor in film studies at Carleton University, Ottawa, who argued that the festival has long been "a liberated zone for African filmmakers to show themselves". Sanogo described Fespaco as "an emancipatory project; something that pertained to and exceeded cinema. It was born in conversation with a large group of theorists and thinkers who were trying to address a number of questions: can we have an African culture if we are colonised? When we get rid of colonisation, what kind of culture and politics of culture could we have?"

Evidently, over the years, the festival has created fertile ground for the formation of a new kind of Afrocentric filmmaking consciousness, influencing generations of filmmakers from the continent and beyond. Reiterating the festival's multi-dimensional potency, Sanogo posited that Fespaco has functioned as an incubation space, "the intellectual and cultural framework within which the pioneers of African cinema emerged". But he also pointed out that "as part of this pan-African movement, the filmmakers and artists had a defined set of responsibilities. There was a sense that the filmmaker knew less than 'the people' but was accountable to 'the people'."

'Fespaco is the only place where people from the Global South have their own space. We can be who we are in our different articulations, languages and aesthetics'

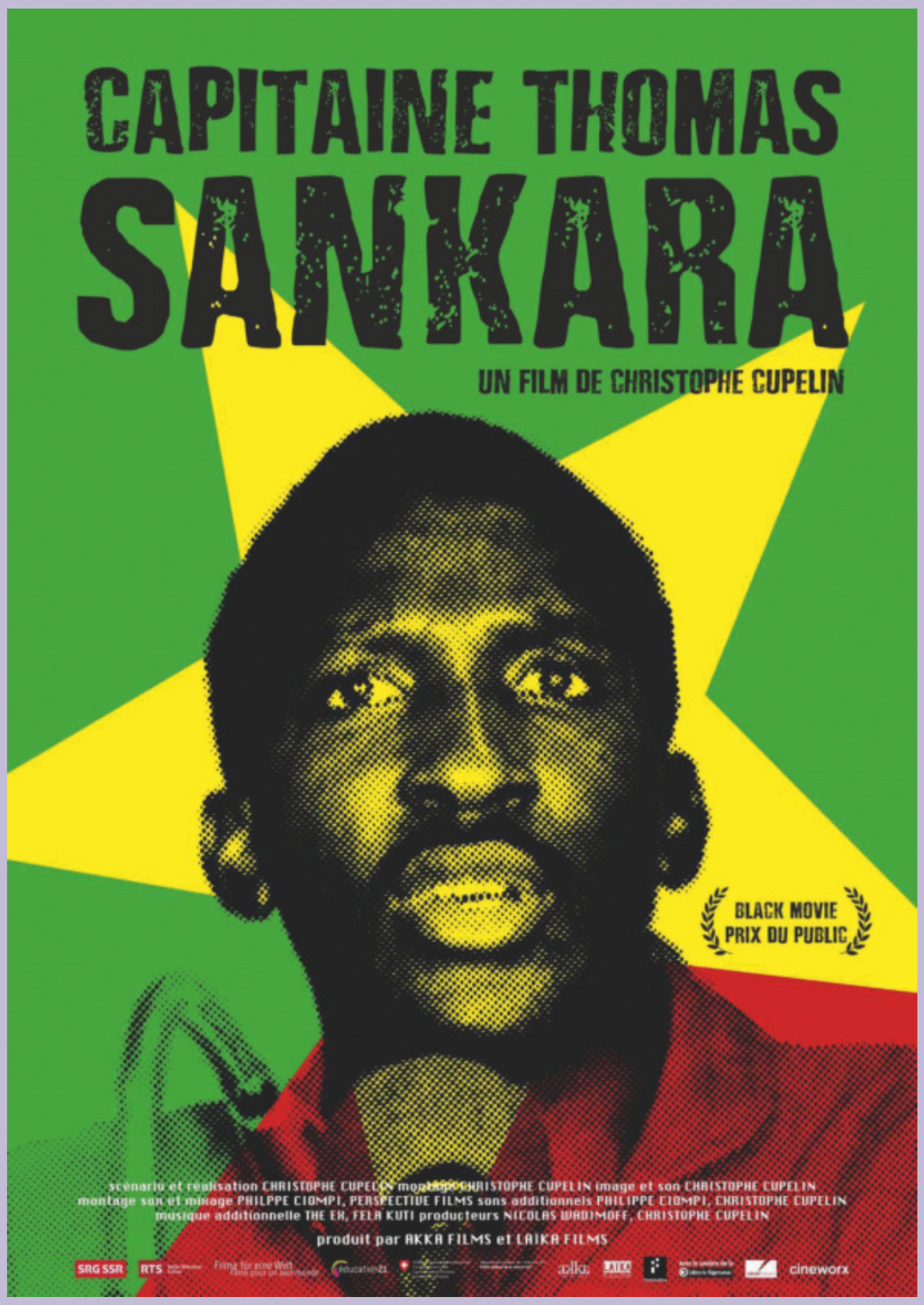
JIHAN EL-TAHRI

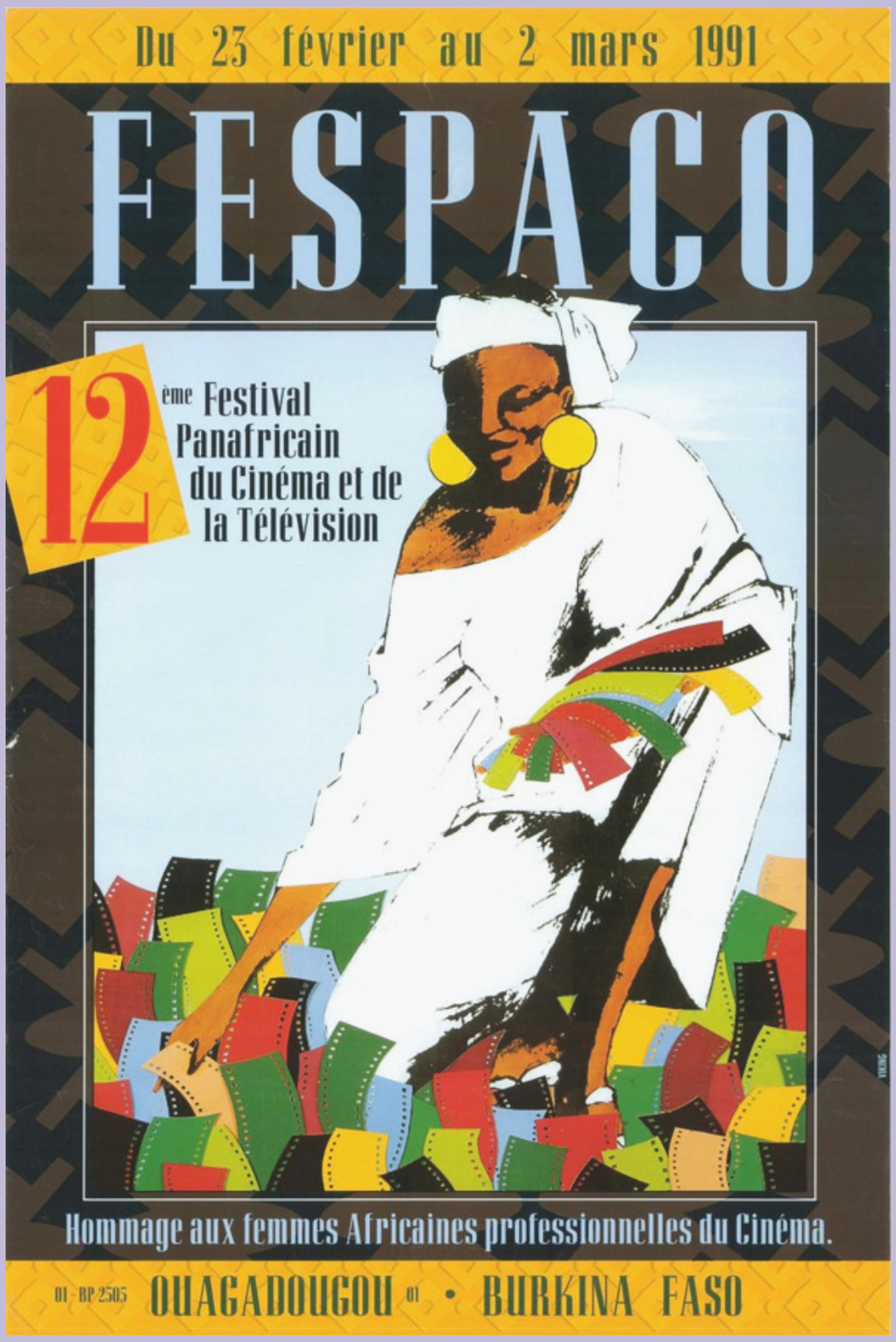
THE RISE AND FALL OF A RADICAL

Looming large in the panel's consideration of the history and legacy of Fespaco was the late Burkinabe leader Thomas Sankara. A committed Marxist revolutionary, Sankara came to power via a military coup in 1983. Known as a 'man of the people', Sankara struck out at corruption and promoted an anticolonial vision for a Burkina shaped by its own needs, prioritising self-determination, childhood health and women's rights. He saw potential in the pan-African ambitions of Fespaco and embraced it wholeheartedly.

Sankara's reputation as something of an African Che Guevara made attendance at the festival even more attractive to filmmakers and artists who saw themselves as part of a pan-African film movement. But in 1987, at the age of 37, Sankara was killed in another coup led by his former friend and co-revolutionary Blaise Compaoré. During Compaoré's rule, which lasted until 2014, Challouf's 2000 documentary about Fespaco, *Ouaga: Capital City of Cinema*, was banned – though it was eventually shown at Il Cinema Ritrovato on the 50th anniversary of Fespaco in 2019, and was also screened at 'Per-Ankh', along with the films *FESPACO '87* (Carolyn Sides, 1987) and *Ouaga: African Cinema Now!* (Nii Kwate Owoo & Kwesi Owusu, 1988).

According to Challouf, the purpose of both Fespaco and the Carthage Film Festival in Tunis, which was founded in 1966, was not merely to screen films but to create a whole ecology of cinema distribution and exhibition, and challenge the domination of other nations' films on African screens. Tunisian film critic Tahar Cheriaa, who founded the Carthage Film Festival, was briefly imprisoned in 1969 for his efforts to get distribution and exhibition nationalised in countries across the continent to create market space for African films. Challouf noted three landmark films that were stifled by lack of finance from Northern hemisphere partners uneasy with the histories being recounted: *Amok* (Souheil Ben-Barka, 1983), *Sarraounia* (Med Hondo, 1986) and *Camp de Thiaroye* (Sembène, 1988). Sankara provided key support during the production of *Sarraounia*, allowing the film to be shot in Burkina Faso when the government of Niger withdrew its support, likely following commercial pressure from France.





Evaluating Sankara's influence on Fespaco, Sanogo stated that the leader's support for the event was "one of few instances on the African continent where the vision of filmmakers and the vision of the state merged. It was magical." He continued, "There is a 'dream deferred' dimension which is still haunting African cinema... [During Sankara's time] there was a clear vision... an ideological spectrum of possibility that was counter to capitalism... many of the pioneers were comrades."

Challouf, too, was unstinting in his praise of the radical figure: "Thomas Sankara did the most for African cinema." Many veterans in the wider African filmmaking community have refused to return to Fespaco since Sankara's assassination, considering attendance to be a betrayal of the progressive vision he stood for. During the panel discussion, the acclaimed Ghanaian British filmmaker and visual artist John Akomfrah, who was in the audience, commented: "Fespaco is difficult to talk about for many of us because of the spectre of Thomas Sankara. The festival was a place of maximum promise as well as the biggest tragedy. There was a Promethean ethic behind Sankara's project, and that ethic assumed that you as the national leader could control the national culture; that you had enough control over the cultural means of transmission to do something and make a real effort. The neoliberal project has put an end to that. There is no African leader anywhere on the continent who even has the illusion or hubris to assume they have any control over their national culture. Sankara's will to do something about the national culture chimed with ours [as African filmmakers]."

'Fespaco's founders made it a pan-African, continental tool. The challenge is to make it an international tool'

MICHEL OUÉDRAOGO

ABOVE
A poster for the 1991 edition of Fespaco

In another impassioned audience interaction, filmmaker Kwesi Owusu offered a counterpoint to the romanticism expressed about the revolutionary: "It was very exciting being there around that time with Sankara... but we idealise that period a bit too much. I think that after so many years we need to step back and look beyond what that represented. We need to look more critically at the military intervention. Sankara had a powerful human face, which softened the harshness of that reality, which was very brutal in many ways."

A NEW GENERATION FESPACO

The panel concluded with reflections on how to fertilise the memory of Fespaco for future generations. A new future for the event needs to be written, should it last another 50 years. Sanogo underscored the conceptual importance of exhibitions like 'PerAnkh' with a clarion call: "We must all contribute to the work of transmission and be actors/curators of the memory of the future, as we are in a period when this memory is being lost, or can be lost, to the contemporary interpretation of cinema." On preserving the pan-African idealism at the heart of Fespaco, El-Tahri affirmed: "It is one of the last remaining spaces where the idea of pan-Africanism is engaged with on the ground; it is concrete. You sit with people you would never meet anywhere else. You engage with them on a cultural level and many, many projects get off the ground in that space."

The second entry in the three-volume book series *African Cinema: Manifesto and Practice for Cultural Decolonisation*, published in August by Indiana University Press, is devoted to Fespaco. Edited by Burkinabe filmmaker Gaston Kaboré and professor Michael T. Martin, and containing contributions from a significant cadre of filmmakers, critics, academics, curators and industry leaders from around the world, it provides a critical and timely resource for reflection on African cinema and its history at Fespaco and beyond. So it would seem that the blueprint for the festival's continuation holds promise. Or, as Fespaco's former director-general Michel Ouédraogo put it in a 2009 interview: "Fespaco's founders made it a pan-African, continental tool. The challenge today is to make it an international tool. The final goal is for Fespaco to become the most important institution of African cinema: if it can combine its political institutional mission and that of creating an event that resonates throughout the world, Fespaco will have achieved its full goal." ■

OUSMANE SEMBÈNE AND AFRICAN CINEMA NOW

Writer and filmmaker Tambay Obenson blazed a trail in early 2000s US film criticism, founding the prolific Black cinema blog Shadow & Act and going on to serve as IndieWire's principal Black cinema staff writer until last year, when he established Akoroko – a media platform dedicated to discourse around African film and TV. As the birth centenary of Ousmane Sembène comes to an end, Obenson muses on the monumental legacy of a filmmaker widely hailed as the 'father of African cinema'

In African spirituality, memory is a life-affirming process that transcends mere recall to become a preserver of life. This ethos resonates powerfully as we mark 100 years since the birth of the filmmaker Ousmane Sembène.

As a young first-generation immigrant of Nigerian and Cameroonian descent living in the United States, I found myself beckoned by African cinema – or perhaps that should be African 'cinemas', the plural better conveying the multiplicity of stories, traditions and untapped potential on the continent. The profound narratives and unique perspectives of African film offered a window into a world that was both familiar and novel to me. After creating the film blog Shadow & Act in the 2000s, which became something of a cultural touchstone, I felt a deeper pull towards African film – an area that has been underrepresented, undervalued and even trivialised on a global scale. I saw an opportunity to create a fresh media platform: Akoroko, which is defined by its desire to delve into the African cinematic canon, uncover its interconnected aesthetic and cultural threads, and chronicle legacies while pondering future trajectories. Serving as a curated space for both film history preservation and critical commentary around new African cinemas, Akoroko aims to build a community around film discourse, especially in English-language territories. The platform also spotlights the continent's moving-image pioneers and trailblazers, consciously reaffirming their rightful place in a global cinematic canon.

BELOW
Black Girl (1966), directed by Ousmane Sembène (above)

IMAGE: BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

Akoroko is among the latest in a long-standing and ongoing series of efforts that have contributed to the evolution of cinema cultures across Africa. Given the platform's objectives – the building of bridges between African cinemas and the rest of the world, and the preservation of African film heritage – it is natural that we celebrate the birth centenary of Sembène, who was so instrumental in shaping discourse on cinema across Africa. His work is an integral part of the majestic tapestry of cinematic voices that spans 54 countries. Sembène's dedication to authentically portraying the myriad of African experiences, and his use of cinema as a medium to critique social issues and celebrate African culture, remains pivotal.

Sembène's 'model' of cinema as both political intervention and artistic expression aligns with that of key contemporaries such as Djibril Diop Mambéty and Haile Gerima; his films critiqued oppressive systems and celebrated the resilience, creativity and solidarity of African people. Sembène was also instrumental in assembling the International Conference on Cinema Production in Africa, first held in Niamey, Niger, in 1982; it serves as a historic example of the collective journey of African cinema cultures. Remembering this conference goes beyond mere commemoration: it's about acknowledging solidarity, recognising trials and celebrating achievements.

PROGRESS AND PITFALLS

The continued growth of Africa's film industries is heartening; they currently contribute $5 billion to the continent's annual GDP, according to the Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers (Fepaci). The digital revolution that was sparked early in the millennium, and accelerated by the exigencies of the Covid-19 pandemic, changed the game: the

The West's rising interest in African stories brings both opportunity and risks, such as the misrepresentation and appropriation of African narratives

widespread use of new technologies, the affordability of digital film equipment and the rise of online platforms have undoubtedly empowered a new generation of African filmmakers. But despite these advancements, notable challenges persist. Among them are the informal nature of the film and audiovisual sectors, piracy, intellectual property issues, lack of education and training, limited internet connectivity, gender inequality and political impediments to freedom of expression. And lamentably, most parts of the continent still have an underfunded film industry. In the midst of all this, the need to safeguard Africa's film archives has never felt more pressing. As Aboubakar Sanogo, executive secretary of Fepaci, has emphasised: "The memory of African cinema must be available to train the new generation of filmmakers, providing them with African filmmakers as models of what cinema can be."

The West's rising interest in African stories brings both opportunity and risks, such as the misrepresentation and appropriation of African narratives. There is a case to be made that the challenges African cinemas face today persist because we have not sufficiently preserved and honoured our rich filmic heritage. Yet even with these challenges, African moving-image cultures remain vibrant, reflecting the panoply of artistic expression and political resistance among African people. The key is to ensure that Africans themselves drive growth and development.

LOOKING AHEAD

Delving into intersections of architecture, culture and identity, Ghanaian Scottish architect Lesley Lokko's 'Laboratory of the Future', an exhibition at this year's Venice Biennale, is a perfect present-day distillation of the creative possibilities of the African continent. Transposed on to the terrain of African cinemas, this 'laboratory' becomes a metaphorical arena of experimentation and redefinition. Lokko envisions a dynamic space where African identities are explored and reimagined. It challenges conventional norms and embraces the eclectic mix of African histories and futures. It's an approach that resonates with the transformative potential of African cinemas, where filmmakers experiment with narratives, styles, themes and the pushing of boundaries.

In Sembène's centenary year, diffusing the past through the imaginative spectrum of a 'Laboratory of the Future' embodies a type of boundless possibility. It speaks to the greater purpose of Akoroko, which exists not just as a platform but as a movement primed to capture the renaissance of African cinemas. It's a nexus where African film communities can converge to learn from the past, engage with the present and shape the future. Our stories and triumphs are the bedrock. Together, these perspectives will articulate Africa's pivotal role in the global cinematic narrative. ■

Revisit 'Ousmane Sembène on the state of African cinema' (1995) at bfi.org.uk/articles/category/black-film-bulletin

ABOVE Akoroko founder Tambay Obenson

Director of photography on Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, John Akomfrah's documentary *Seven Songs for Malcolm X* and Spike Lee's *Crooklyn*, Arthur Jafa has crafted an oeuvre that also encompasses music, philosophy and science-fiction art. He had a wide-ranging conversation with *Black Film Bulletin* co-founder June Givanni in London in February 1993, excerpts from which are reproduced below

ARTHUR

CINEMATOGRAPHY

The cinematography has to serve the director's vision, which means in some ways you have to function as a tool. Ideally I like to function as a cinematographer who has his own issues and concerns, and when a director hires me, hopefully – ideally – they want me to bring those concerns to that particular project.

How that works out, in some sense, depends on who I work with. Some jobs are just jobs; you just shoot them. But films like *Daughters of the Dust* [1991] and *Seven Songs* [*for Malcolm X*, 1993] are more collaborative: what those directors require of me is to function in a more extended kind of way. In pre-production, I'll bombard the director with images, I'll provoke the director, I'll write my own notes, I'll conceptualise around what we're trying to do. In *Daughters*, the film is about Black Americans coming into being. In a way it's about when Africans ceased to be Africans and became Americans. So as a cinematographer, I started to think about how we translate that into some kind of structural filmic concern. To suggest some of the indeterminacy of who Black people were at that point in the Americas, we ended up using what I call 'declensions' – playing around with speed, which is the sort of thing you see Scorsese utilise in *Raging Bull* [1980], for example, but to different ends.

'In pre-production, I'll bombard the director with images, I'll provoke the director, I'll write my own notes, I'll conceptualise around what we're trying to do'

BLACK FILM AESTHETICS

When I was at Howard [University in Washington DC, studying film and architecture], the very notion of 'Black film' was a somewhat radical one. In time I started to become somewhat dissatisfied with definitions because there's a way in

JAFA REVISITED

which the response 'Black Film is against Hollywood' has its limitations. What it does is set you up in a binary opposition to Hollywood, which is limiting, because it means that if Hollywood has narrative then you have to be anti-narrative. It's kind of absurd. Films that were being given to me as examples of Black film would use a classical Hollywood spatial continuity, which in itself is not wrong, but I began to feel like the rules around spatial continuity are intrinsically tied to the cultural systems that generated those rules. The relationship between camera placements is tied to eurocentrism, which is really egocentrism. That logic system is very much tied into Renaissance perspective, vanishing points and a way of looking at the world which says, "I am at the centre of the universe and everything proceeds from me." So what I started to ask myself was: *if* spatial continuity was tied to a cultural logic, then since there are other cultural logics, there should be other spatial systems.

At the time I was looking at the works of Oscar Micheaux, an African American filmmaker and producer of over 38 feature films. The first film I saw was *God's Step Children* [1938]. After that I saw *Ten Minutes to Live* [1932], which I think is an amazing piece of work. The work was being described to me as 'bad cinema' – an example of what not to do primarily because of his use of light-skinned people, and because they understood his control of spatial continuity and screen direction as being deficient, quite frankly.

The point I'm making is that some of the 'accidents' he made are in fact not accidents per se, but have been dictated by some deep cultural logic... What I came to believe is that what Black people do is not arbitrary. It is tied to a deeply situated cultural system that dictates how we approach various things. The question of African retention is linked to something I like to call 'cultural stabilities' – core things which really have to do with who we are on a neurological level. If you look at the Middle Passage [the forced voyage of enslaved Africans to the New World] as a clear example of this, what you see is that African American artforms tend to be particularly developed in music, rhythm, dance, orature – the things you can carry in your head. You're not going to carry architecture or sculpture with you.

ABOVE
Daughters of the Dust (1991), which was shot by Arthur Jafa

BELOW
Arthur Jafa's 1988 self-portrait *Monster*

POLYVENTIALITY

The reason I talk about music as a jump-off point for Black cinema is that there's some consensual agreement... We've got a consensus around achievement and if we start thinking about Black music's relationship to African philosophical tradition and understand Western music's relationship to these philosophical traditions, then we can start positing in a very speculative kind of way certain possibilities for Black cinema. Music is less about sound: it's really about how our minds work, how we see and understand the world and not just what we see in the world, but actually *how* we see the world. What you can see in music is the polyrhythmic – towards double, triple, quadruple entendre.

Polyventiality [a term Jafa coined and defined as "multiple tones, multiple rhythms, multiple perspectives, multiple meanings – multiplicity"] is central to understanding Black expression because what it's about is a different kind of relationship to the world – much less hierarchical. In Black music this plays itself out in a tendency to treat tonality not as a fixed sonic phenomenon, but as an inherently unstable phenomenon that's always moving. That sense of dynamic instability is really part and parcel of a Black way of looking at the world. A musicologist at the turn of the century studying African music said the most difficult thing about studying music of the Negro is his tendency to "worry" the note... My whole thing is about opening up possibilities and then we can decide which are best.

ARTHUR JAFA PORTRAIT: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THE GLADSTONE GALLERY; TOP IMAGE: BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

INDEPENDENT FILM

I'm very much a product of the American Black independent film scene. My ideas have been shaped by it and by much of the discourse of these filmmakers I've been privy to. The school of UCLA filmmakers [comprising] the 'LA Rebellion', from the mid-1970s up to the mid-80s – Charles Burnett, Larry Clark, Julie Dash, Ben Caldwell, Haile Gerima, Barbara McCullough – was the first sustained attempt by a group of African American filmmakers to create films that reflected who we were at a multiplicity of levels, in terms of subject position, not subject matter.

At the same time I always felt there was something of a generational difference. I always felt like they were operating inside a certain pre-1960s notion: for example, I can't remember a time before colour TV. I think that's the main critical difference.

BLACK BRITISH FILM

When the Black British workshop scene started, I had a very intense engagement with it because here was another example of Black filmmakers articulating some of the same kinds of issues: what does 'Black cinema' mean and is it something that's desirable? This whole question of Black cinema came up in a [1988 issue of] *Screen* journal titled 'The Last "Special Issue" on Race?'. The critique of essentialism came up and I didn't agree with what the anti-essentialists were saying because they went in the face of everything I knew. I just assumed at that point that I was an essentialist and eventually realised that in fact I was not an essentialist, and I jokingly started referring to myself as an anti-anti-essentialist. I understood the political necessity of critiquing essentialist notions of who Black people are, which are used to bang us over the head, but I felt that throwing out the notion that there is anything specific to the Black experience was incredibly problematic and aesthetically limiting at the very least.

Later on, I had an opportunity to see some Black British films and meet some of the filmmakers – John Akomfrah at the Flaherty Film Seminar, where he was showing *Testament* [1988]; Isaac Julien after that, and then Maureen Blackwood actually came down to the location when we were shooting *Daughters*. Over the years, it turned to friendship and trying to create different kinds of communities based around different aesthetic considerations.

US BLACK FILM '93

We haven't achieved Black cinema yet... Black cinema is the orgasm that you can talk about but can't really describe to people until they experience one. Filmmakers who have done things that I think have been successful – like Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* [1978], like *Daughters of the Dust*, like Larry Clark's *Passing Through* [1977] – haven't been picked up and developed... Consequently, these people have been erased to a certain degree. The generation of filmmakers that preceded Spike Lee had a lot of anxieties about success and they couldn't really conceptualise a moment where they could be both radically Black and successful – how to get around that bind of 'selling out'.

What Spike did was change the stakes overnight. It wasn't just enough to be a Black filmmaker who had Black issues. You basically had to get out and engage with the real world. Spike's success with *She's Gotta Have It* [1986] put people on notice. If they were to be relevant, they were going to have to work out theoretical issues in a mainstream context. ■

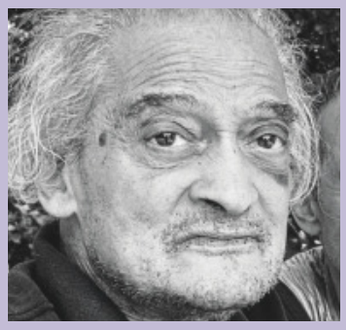
'The generation of filmmakers that preceded Spike Lee had a lot of anxieties about success and they couldn't really conceptualise a moment where they could be both radically Black and successful'

Originally published in *BFB* 1993, Vol. 1, Issue 3. Edited by Kodwo Eshun. Explore the full conversation in the *BFB* collection at bfi.org.uk/articles/category/black-film-bulletin

LEFT
Tracy Camilla Johns and Tommy Redmond Hicks in Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It* (1986)

IN MEMORIAM

Horace Ové 1936-2023



In preparing for this issue, we learned of the sad death of Sir Horace Ové, Trinidad-born pioneer of British and Black cinema, television and photography. We will pay our respects to his legacy more substantially once we have digested this news but were unable to let this moment pass without marking his incredible life.

In 2021, Horace's son Zak Ové wrote a touching account of his father's artistry in the *BFB*, in which he reflects: "[Horace's] legacy is about choosing to act when faced with injustices, and realising the change is yours to make." We couldn't think of a more fitting tribute than this to the man and his everlasting contribution to British culture.

The *BFB* team extend our deepest condolences to Zak and the entire Ové family.

Visit bfi.org.uk/articles/category/black-film-bulletin to read Zak Ové's 2021 article

ON OUR RADAR

Mark your calendars for the world premiere of the Nigerian thriller *Over the Bridge*, which will be screened in Picturehouse Cinemas around the UK in partnership with Beyond Nollywood, an initiative that spotlights new wave Nigerian cinema.

Over the Bridge screens at selected Picturehouse Cinemas nationwide on 18 October only

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THE NEXT *BLACK FILM BULLETIN* WILL APPEAR IN MAY 2024.

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illy and I kept in touch after I left publicity. I became a film journalist and he made *Sorcerer* (1977). He was devastated by its failure at the box office and sent me a harrowing letter from Var, southern France, where he was living with his then-wife, Jeanne Moreau. The next year, he came to Boston to film *The Brink's Job* and I showed up with my video crew from the local NBC affiliate to interview him. The timing was fortunate: he had just kicked the studio's featurette crew off the set and welcomed ours, and we had a splendid session during which he confessed that he came to Boston not so much to make the movie but to hang around his favourite basketball team, the Celtics.

When Billy agreed – without hesitation – to my writing his biography in the late 80s, I quickly discovered that Friedkin was an easy person to get to know but an enigma to know. What I hadn't realised at the time was that he was adrift. Two failed marriages. Films fallen through. Although he'd scored his first bona fide box-office success in over a decade with 1985's *To Live and Die in L.A.* – a sun-drenched policier that is arguably the equal of his breakout hit *The French Connection* (1971) – he had taken to directing TV movies, music videos and episodes of television. (The 1985 'Nightcrawlers' instalment of *The Twilight Zone* is still considered one of the most violent shows ever seen on broadcast TV). He did complete a serial-killer drama, *Rampage* (1987), but it fell by the wayside when the production company (run by Dino De Laurentiis, who was also in charge of distribution) began to implode.

In other words, when I began writing *Hurricane Billy* in 1988, the former wunderkind, who had just turned 53, was at his most vulnerable and confessional. For the next two years we met in Los Angeles, Boston, Canada, and in various editing rooms or on location shoots, and we talked. He detested psychiatry and resisted analysing himself, but he was, I felt, remarkably brave in allowing such an intimate book to be written about him while his career was still in progress. Or perhaps he thought it was over. While we were having our talks, he embarked on *The Guardian* (1990), from a script that he heavily rewrote. A gothic horror tale about a possessed tree, it seemed to straddle the religious themes of *The Exorcist* (though this time more druid than Christian) and the fairytale feel of a Brothers Grimm story. Audiences craving another *Exorcist*

PREVIOUS PAGE
The Exorcist

BELOW
Ellen Burstyn as Chris MacNeil and Linda Blair as her daughter Regan

OPPOSITE, TOP
Lee J. Cobb as Lieutenant William Kinderman

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM
Linda Blair with Max von Sydow as Father Merrin and Jason Miller as Father Karras

THE FRIEDKIN FILES

The director on *The Exorcist*, from interviews with Mark Kermode in the archives of *Sight and Sound* and the BFI

ON THE SUBJECT MATTER

'My interest in its theological validity was virtually nil. I approached it first as a damn good story: engrossing; unexpected; highly original... beautifully drawn characters. I found Blatty's novel excellent, and I didn't want to change a comma."

ON HIS DIRECTORIAL STYLE

'There are very few close-ups because I didn't want the film to be overwrought. I didn't want to put a stamp or a style on the picture... As a viewer you are just left alone with these characters to figure out how you feel.'

ON THE DEMON'S VOICE

'[Linda] Blair did all the original dialogue, and I sent it to [voice actor] Ken Nordine, who did some experiments using his own voice fed through a computer. But it was still the sound of a man's voice dubbed on to the face of a child... I threw myself at the mercy of the movie God, and the name [of *Johnny Guitar* actress] Mercedes McCambridge popped into my mind.'

ON HOW THE FILM PLAYS TODAY

'My main feeling now is that it seems extremely well made. It's like a Chippendale dresser or a Louis XIV chair – it does what it was designed to do. And there aren't many movies... my own or others', that I can say that about.'

Interviewed by Mark Kermode
Sight and Sound, July 1998

Continued overleaf ▶

IMAGES: BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2), ALAMY (1)

Friedkin excised from the theatrical cut of *The Exorcist* any scenes that discussed faith, saying he wasn't making a commercial for the church. And yet for a man who professed no religion, he made a more powerful religious movie than anything Cecil B. DeMille ever did

ABOVE
Linda Blair with William Friedkin on the set of *The Exorcist*

were disappointed: what they got was an amalgam of satire and horror that didn't work as either genre.

Who was William Friedkin? As his biographer, I'm supposed to know. Like all great directors, he was a master manipulator. But he could also be direct: his infamous slapping of Father William O'Malley, the priest who played the part of Father Dyer in *The Exorcist*, in order to make Dyer seem genuinely vulnerable on screen was not the only time he got physical with an actor. Billy loved breaking rules, whether speeding at 90mph under a Brooklyn rail line for *The French Connection* or lying to Los Angeles airport authorities that he would respect security while shooting *To Live and Die in L.A.*. On *The Exorcist*, he became something like a surrogate father to Linda Blair, allowed Jason Miller and O'Malley to get drunk rehearsing a scene where they were to play drunk, and showed his gratitude to studio executives – who, upon being stunned by an early cut of the film, had just given the director carte blanche – by saying, "Fuck 'em."

Like all geniuses – and I consider Friedkin a genius, for he used old things in new ways and changed cinema to that extent – he was a mass of contradictions, some of them contrived to keep others off balance, and some of them involuntary. It's the latter that I find more fascinating. In a sense, he used the production process to discover how he felt about the subject he was shooting, and therefore more about himself. *Cruising* (1980) was a police thriller, but it ventured into the realms of sexuality and identity. Friedkin started *Rampage* as a protest against the death penalty, but later came out in favour of some capital punishment.

If Friedkin's beliefs are in his films, the difficulty is that his films contain more beliefs than can exist compatibly. As Father Merrin says in *The Exorcist*, "The demon is a liar. He will lie to confuse us; but he will also mix lies with the truth." What some might call 'lies', Friedkin called 'textures', images or sounds he put into his films to confuse and challenge the viewer: changing killers and voices – and inserting quick cuts from porn movies into the stabbing scenes – in *Cruising*; adding a mysterious gunshot at the end of *The French Connection*; sticking the haunting sounds of an idling truck engine after the end titles in *Sorcerer*. Even Friedkin's penultimate film, the 2017 documentary *The Devil and Father Amorth*, might be a con job: in it, he records what he claims is an actual exorcism that, in the end, doesn't 'take'. Was the victim faking? Was Father Amorth, the exorcist, a fraud? Was Billy a victim of the scam, or one of its perpetrators? In the words of Mark Kermode, who helped Billy with the narrative, "*The Exorcist* is a film about faith; *The Devil and Father Amorth* is about doubt."

It is *The Exorcist* where I believe Friedkin addressed his most profound personal dilemmas. Here was a man who was raised Jewish but became infatuated with the rituals of the Catholic Church, to the point where he once took communion during production. He refused to call *The Exorcist* a horror film, preferring, as did Blatty, to label it, perhaps disingenuously, a "supernatural detective story". To Blatty's frustration, Friedkin excised from the theatrical cut any scenes that discussed faith, saying he wasn't making a commercial for the church. And yet for a man who professed no religion, he made a more powerful religious movie than anything Cecil B. DeMille ever did.

Alternately stoic and moody, cruel and warm, jocular and morose, indulgent and manipulative, Billy ended up giving his audiences more information than they could process. To a generation of viewers who chose *Star Wars* (1977) over *Sorcerer*, his voyages were too risky to embark on. Yet he trucked on regardless, firm in the conviction that real life is more interesting than fantasy. ■

ON HOW THE FILM WAS RECEIVED BY THE CHURCH

'At the very highest levels of the Catholic Church, it was praised. The general of the Jesuit Order – a man named Father Pedro Arrupe, who lived in Milan at the time – had his own print of the film and would screen it for friends and colleagues, [and] the Cardinal in New York at the time... They recognised that it was very solid Catholic doctrine.'

ON FILMIC INFLUENCES

'There was one film that I saw before I made *The Exorcist*: Danish filmmaker Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Ordet* [1955], which means 'The Word'. And it's a straightforward film about literal resurrection and the mystery of faith. And you see a dead body, the head of a family... the family is in grief, and they pray over this body. And in the final image of the film, the body rises up from the coffin, and it's absolutely believable and breathtaking. You believe in resurrection at that moment. That was a kind of a guide for me as to how to do *The Exorcist*. Straightforward, straight on, with no technique, with no style. I didn't want to clutter the film up with style. I remember a remark Ernest Hemingway had made... [He said] in an interview... 'I have no style. What passes for my style is what I've done to cover up the mistakes that I've made.' And that's totally true of my work as well. I set out consciously to give *The Exorcist* no style.'

Interviewed by Mark Kermode
Guardian lecture, BFI Southbank, 1998

IMAGE: BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

DESIGNING THE DEMON

In an extract from Nat Segaloff's new book *The Exorcist Legacy: 50 Years of Fear* make-up artists Dick Smith and Rick Baker detail how they transformed Linda Blair into the devil

Special make-up artist Dick Smith, who was confident in his skills, sometimes clashed with Friedkin, who was equally confident in his, yet each man respected the other. "He was tough," said Smith, "but it was very stimulating. He drove me to do some of the best work that I'd done up to that time. A make-up artist gets a great thrill changing someone's face because, in a sense, he is creating a new, living creature. I was faced with the problem of making this twelve-year-old little girl, a pretty little girl with apple cheeks and butterball nose, into a demon. It was an incredible challenge."

The first task Smith faced was his own limitations. "My training in television had been quality for a low price," he said, "one of the lessons I [un]learned on *The Exorcist*. I dismissed out of hand our doing something [of which] I said, 'Oh, it would be much too costly to do it.' And Billy Friedkin admonished me, 'That's not your problem. I'll decide if it's too expensive to do it.' And his option was to do it. I realised, of course, I'm thinking like television... I had to get used to the reality of film. My job then became to promote even the most costly thing if I thought it would be better, and not worry about the cost."

BELOW
Linda Blair, possessed, in *The Exorcist*

IMAGE: ALAMY

Needing to manufacture an endless supply of the foam latex appliances in the visionary process that he had invented, Smith enlisted the help of a young man who wanted to follow in his footsteps: Rick Baker. "With the make-up like this, a foam rubber appliance make-up," Baker explains, "it's pretty much a new set of rubber appliance pieces every day that you work. Dick was pretty much a one-man show. He worked in his basement. If Linda [Blair] worked 50 days, he would have to pretty much make 50 sets of appliances. He had prepared all this and was ready to start filming, and the first day Linda worked, one of the grips said, 'Oh, she's got her mask on today.' [Friedkin] heard that and said, 'It's too masky, do another one.' And Dick said, 'What do you mean, "do another one"? This took me months to prepare.' 'Well, we can't shoot this. It looks like a mask.'"

The mechanical effects had to be equally novel, if not downright visionary. Friedkin's declaration that the possession would only look real if it was really happening (albeit for earthly reasons) led him to Marcel Vercoutere, a mechanical genius whose dedication to his craft rivalled Friedkin's. Born in Detroit in 1925 to a French father and Belgian mother, after serving in World War II, Vercoutere moved to Hollywood with his wife and found work in the movie studios that were wallowing in the postwar box-office boom. He developed an interest in special mechanical stunts such as those used in car chases, gunfights, and exploding structures. By the 1970s at Warner Bros, he had contributed to *Deliverance* [1972] and *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* [1971] before diving into *The Exorcist*.

"He was a strange soul, like me," Friedkin once said of Vercoutere, "an experimenter and a perfectionist." In preparation for the August 1972 start date, Vercoutere assembled a zealous crew and moved his family into the basement of the 54th Street studio where they would be shooting in New York. He and the team created, among other effects, three beds that would perform various movements; built Regan's bedroom on eight pneumatic wheels that could rock the set as if an earthquake hit it; and crafted a device that would thrash Regan around in the bed. "If I was the devil, I would get up there and thrash her," Vercoutere told Friedkin, "and Billy said, 'Go ahead and do it.'" It was he who, allied with Dick Smith, built the model of Regan with the spinning head. To give it a test once it was completed, Vercoutere drove around Manhattan with 'her' sitting beside him staring out the passenger window. When they caught a driver's eye, they would spin the head and watch the person freak out.

© Nat Segaloff/Citadel

The Exorcist Legacy: 50 Years of Fear, published by Citadel, is out now

SHOCK TACTICS: WILLIAM FRIEDKIN (1935–2023)

The director, who died in August aged 87, combined the classical storytelling strengths of 1950s American cinema with a taste for modernism derived from the *nouvelle vague* and other art-film movements of the 60s, writes Adrian Martin

In William Friedkin's 1968 film of Harold Pinter's classic 1957 play *The Birthday Party*, a seemingly playful moment turns threatening. Meg (Dandy Nichols) offers her sullen houseguest, Stanley (Robert Shaw), a child's drum as a present. He stands up and parades around the room with it, beating a military rhythm. But when he reaches Meg, his drumming becomes manic and insistent; he appears to be attacking her.

Friedkin, who has already amplified the drum sound in post-sync, adds a further, disorienting touch: at the intense height of the scene, where in the stage play the curtain would fall, he cuts, for several seconds, to blackness and silence.

Friedkin took the blackout idea from the play, but was inspired by it to make such a gesture the centre of his filmic art: his approach to filmmaking is encapsulated in the black hole punched in that scene. Shock, surprise, confusion: these are the states he wanted the spectators of his films to inhabit, as often and as powerfully as possible. Little wonder, then, that he became a specialist in the popular genres of horror, thriller and action. At the same time, his attachment to *The Birthday Party* – "a revelation as pivotal as *Citizen Kane*" when he first saw it in Chicago in 1962 – indicates his deep respect for a certain strain of so-called high culture.

Throughout his career, he returned to adapting famous plays for the screen, such as Reginald Rose's *Twelve Angry Men* in 1997, and, shortly before his death, a modernised version of Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial*, which recently premiered in Venice. Relatively late in his life, he also became a prolific director of operas in the US and Europe.

In a crucial sense, however, Friedkin made no distinction between these shades of high and low culture. "What I still want from a film – or a play, a painting, a novel, a piece of music," he wrote in his 2013 memoir *The Friedkin Connection*, "is exhilaration. I want to be moved and surprised at some revelation about the human condition."

Friedkin's path as a filmmaker began as a manager of live TV shows in the early 1960s and quickly found independent expression in the hard-hitting documentary *The People Versus Paul Crump* (1962), which mixed interviews with dramatic recreations reminiscent of John Cassavetes' *Shadows* (1959). His first features, the painfully zany pop musical *Good Times* (1967) with Sonny and Cher, and the period comedy *The Night They Raided Minsky's* (1968), gave little indication of what he would later achieve. It was *The Birthday Party* and the gay-themed *The Boys in the Band* (1970), from Mart Crowley's play, that placed him on surer creative footing.

The taste for shock transitions – and the lingering mysteries they can create – are evident everywhere in Friedkin's two most commercially successful films, *The French Connection* (1971) and *The Exorcist* (1973). The conclusion of the former – an image of the unconventional cop Popeye (Gene Hackman) running off screen, followed by the sound of a gunshot and a cut to black – left many viewers puzzled, but that is exactly what Friedkin wanted. *The Exorcist* is a remarkably elliptical film: over and again, it builds to a terrifying crescendo and then simply cuts away to a new scene.

Both *The French Connection* and *The Exorcist* could be rhetorically described as epoch-defining films. But Friedkin himself was not particularly nostalgic over the much-vaunted era of 1970s American cinema, with its short-lived burst of freedom for filmmakers. And neither, as spectators and critics, should we seek to lock Friedkin up in the mythologised memory of that period. He was someone who was determined to move with the times, constantly renewing himself.

Friedkin may have imagined himself as sitting awkwardly between two distinct generations of American filmmakers. He was too young to have been part of the live TV drama generation (which he greatly admired) of Sidney Lumet, Arthur Penn and John Frankenheimer (who took the *French Connection II* gig in 1975); and he was slightly displaced from the gang acclaimed as 1970s mavericks that included Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola and Brian De Palma. But his in-between status served him well as an artist.

Although he tried his hand at a bit of everything along the way – theatre, music videos (for Laura Branigan and Barbra Streisand), TV series episodes (*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, 2007/2009), a return to personal documentary (*The Devil and Father Amorth*, 2017) – Friedkin's sensibility had a solid dual foundation. He combined the classical storytelling strengths of 1950s American cinema with a taste for modernism derived from the *nouvelle vague* and other art-film movements of the 60s.

Friedkin was painfully aware that his early smash successes set a benchmark that, in purely industrial terms, he never again equalled. He joked that the remainder of his career was an "uphill climb to the bottom". Cinephiles, of course, know better: *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985) and *Blue Chips* (1994) are works of remarkable energy and inventiveness. Furthermore, his films are being steadily reappraised: *Sorcerer* (1977) and *Cruising* (1980) are respected far more today than on their initial release. Friedkin, whenever possible, helped his back catalogue along with 'director's cut' rereleases and in-depth masterclasses in many parts of the world.

Even a seeming misstep such as *The Guardian* (1990) – mercilessly derided in its day and omitted altogether from Friedkin's

OPPOSITE
William Friedkin

BELOW
William Petersen and John Pankow in *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985)

PORTRAIT: STEVE APPLEFORD/REDUX/EYEVINE; IMAGE: BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

memoir – is worth revisiting as a smart precursor to the current folk/eco-horror revival. The disquieting *Rampage* (1987) turns out, similarly, to be prophetic of the 21st-century true crime obsession: this tale, largely set in a courtroom, 'tunes in' to the mind of a serial killer (played by Alex McArthur) so uncannily that, at moments, it almost appears to offer a sympathetic apologia for his nihilistic acts.

Like several other filmmakers who came to prominence in the 70s, Friedkin tended to stumble only in the realm of outright comedy, such as the brittle *Deal of the Century* (1983). Even in this vein, however, his films repay a fresh look. *The Brink's Job* (1978), for example, comes to life the darker and more melancholic it becomes – when the unlikely success of a group of amateur criminals (led by Peter Falk) inexorably turns toward failure, isolation and betrayal.

Friedkin had some unusual ways of working. Like De Palma, he pre-defined clear set-piece scenes (chases, confrontations, revelations, sex scenes) – detachable by their very nature. Pre-production constituted a particularly intense creative stage. Extensive location scouting, absorption in many types of music and an insistent involvement in successive drafts of the script were all means of bringing the subject and material closer to his creative core.

In the end, his films are palimpsests, layerings of diverse inputs, themes, points of interests – all evident in the heavily textured and patterned surface of the work, but not necessarily forming a tidy, organic meaning in the mind of the spectator. American critic Bill Krohn has documented how no successive draft of *Cruising*, no option entertained in the crafting of its mystery, ever entirely left the work table; the script became a collage of possible interpretations, giving the film its enduring, sometimes bewildering richness.

Many of Friedkin's movies were fractured in a modernist manner. That's captured in his favoured method of literally stacking diverse music tracks simultaneously in the sound mix (much to the surprise of his canny music collaborator, Jack Nitzsche); in the multiplication of preludes to the main storyline of *The Exorcist* (which Bernard Herrmann, who was briefly courted to compose a score, irritatedly told him to cut); or the long, dazzling montage, leaping far ahead into the plot, that opens *To Live and Die in L.A.* – which the director candidly described as comprising "random shots I had no idea I would use until I got into the cutting room and their usefulness was revealed".

The critic Robin Wood suggestively proposed that *Cruising* was an "incoherent text", and that this incoherence was symptomatic of its time and culture; what he overlooked was the hint that Friedkin, all along, was in the business of deliberately manufacturing incoherence. Underneath the shock tactics, however, Friedkin's dearest themes are evident. To paraphrase the French critic Jean-François Tarnowski: hero and villain constantly switch places; and the assumed goodness of the hero is, from the very beginning, put in question.

From *The French Connection* to *Jade* (1995) and *The Hunted* (2003), these qualities of ambiguity and reversal hold firm. Or, as Friedkin himself reflected, the "themes that continue to haunt me" are "guilt, obsession, the breakdown of social order, a man's inner conflict over his own actions".

'The themes that continue to haunt me are guilt, obsession, the breakdown of social order, a man's inner conflict over his own actions'

The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial gives us a sturdy expression of Friedkin's classical side. Harking back to the era of live TV drama (as well as to his own *Rules of Engagement*, 2000), it is a study of human psychology under the pressure of both a closed space – a military courtroom – and a compressed time frame. Friedkin's tight *mise en scène* and his collaboration with actors have never been better showcased.

Friedkin's script makes superficial alterations to Wouk's story (the naval mutiny in question occurs in the Persian Gulf rather than during World War II, major players in the trial are Black and female), but its core remains: Lieutenant Maryk (Jake Lacy) faces a charge of mutiny for replacing, at the height of a crisis at sea, his commander, Queeg (Kiefer Sutherland) – whom he has judged to be unstable and paranoid. Maryk's defense is argued by the wily Greenwald (Jason Clarke), who faces off against Challee (Monica Raymund) for the prosecution. Friedkin leaves in the single most memorable detail of any production, in any medium, of this play: Queeg's habit of ostentatiously rolling two metal balls between his fingers at moments of tension.

It is easy to tell what drew Friedkin to this material. For almost its entire running time, it appears to support an interpretation of events that is anti-authoritarian – and on the side of the youthful Maryk. There's a grim satisfaction in watching Queeg crumble under examination, a sadistic spectacle that serves to manifest every implied criticism of him. But a few grey zones – Greenwald's personal opinion of the case, and the role in events played by Maryk's close friend Keefer (Lewis Pullman) – set the ground for a final scene reversal. And Friedkin finds there, one last time, an opportunity for a strong, sudden cut to black before the credits roll.

But Friedkin had already made what can be considered his swansong – and it was a one-two punch. In the new century, his career reached a new plateau of excellence – partly thanks to the writer Tracy Letts. *Bug* (2006) and *Killer Joe* (2011), adapted by Letts from his own plays, allowed the director an extraordinary opportunity to discover for himself what the cultural critic Edward Said described as a 'late style' common to some artists in their older age.

Late style is not about the achievement of serenity and wisdom; rather, it marks the moment when a creator goes for broke, no longer concerned with compromise, unafraid to push boundaries or to offend. Which is to say, in Friedkin's case, that he proved himself in these masterpieces absolutely faithful to the most radical impulses of his youth – but with these impulses now married to the most exacting craft.

Where *Bug* is hallucinatory in its immersive vision of a *folie à deux* (brilliantly embodied by Ashley Judd and Michael Shannon), *Killer Joe* allows a more objective look at a sordid milieu of abuse and domination. Friedkin concludes it with a suitably outrageous gesture. As the confrontations between the characters reach their violent apex, Dottie (Juno Temple) halts everything with the announcement that she's pregnant. That's the cue for a song to play over the credits: Clarence Carter's bawdy 1986 rock-soul classic 'Strokin'' – which is, basically, a celebration of sex.

Friedkin subsequently declared that he would gladly put 'Strokin'' at the end of any film – even an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. That's the kind of style – late or otherwise – we need more of in contemporary cinema. ■

BELOW
Ashley Judd and Michael Shannon in Friedkin's *Bug* (2006)

IMAGE: BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

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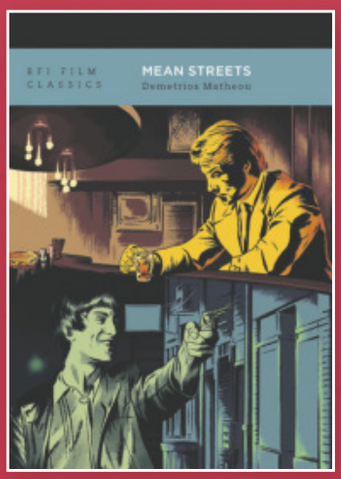

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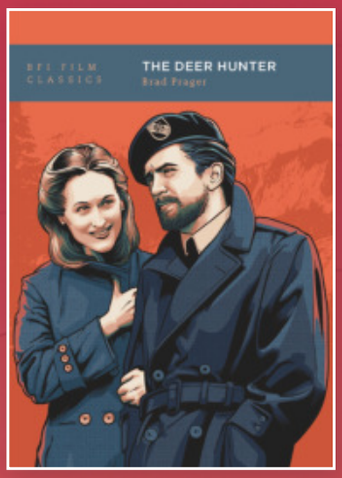

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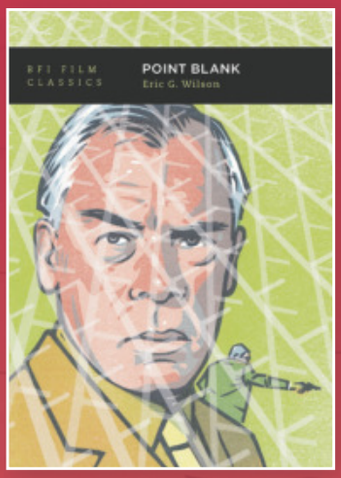
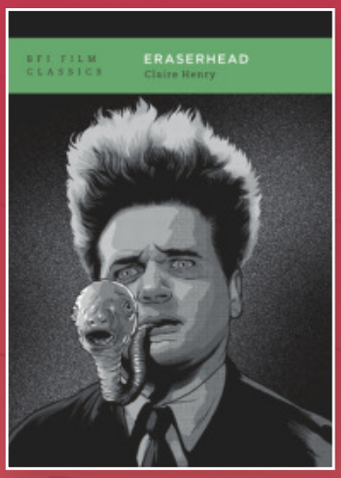


Point Blank



Eraserhead

Lost in Translation

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Great films by Yorgos Lanthimos, Hamaguchi Ryûsuke and Agnieszka Holland were the deserving winners of the top prizes at the festival, which also saw strong work by David Fincher, Richard Linklater and newcomer Luna Carmoon

BY KIERON CORLESS

DO LOOK NOW

FESTIVAL REPORT: VENICE 2023

At an edition of the Venice film festival extremely light on celebrity traffic, for reasons by now well rehearsed, it was inevitable that storied cinema icon Woody Allen would be lionised when he pitched up on the Lido with his new film *Coup de Chance*, regardless of lingering doubts about events in his past. Far more surprising was the fact that, for once in who knows how long, this Allen film was actually quite watchable. And, in its own strange, lite and Allenesque way, it even seemed to connect thematically with preoccupations surfacing in other more accomplished and subtle films on the Lido.

Coup de Chance is in French and set in Paris, where Fanny (Lou de Laâge), the formerly bohemian wife of rich shady businessman Jean (Melvil Poupaud) bumps into old college friend Alain (Niels Schneider), now a laidback aspiring writer. An affair inevitably ensues until her control-freak husband gets wind and plots to snuff it out. Allen posits two versions of masculinity, one artistically inclined and open to life's contingencies, the other money-driven, paranoid and leaving nothing to chance. The film's a divertissement, simplistic and caricatured, but tautly mounted and made with some brio. Its most interesting aspect is stylistic; the ironic take on life espoused by Alain bleeds into the film's aesthetic, a contrapuntal coating of cocktail-hour jazz and honeyed visuals ladled over one or two nasty occurrences. It's practically Brechtian, if probably unwittingly so. Allen has given us a broad-strokes allegory for our times, whereby rapacious capital will crush anything or anyone upholding different values.

In the magnificently entertaining Golden Lion winner *Poor Things*, directed by Yorgos Lanthimos and based on the 1992 novel by Alasdair Gray, a surgeon (Willem Dafoe) fishes a just drowned pregnant woman out of a river, resurrects her by transplanting the baby's brain into her body, and christens the resulting creation Bella Baxter (Emma Stone); she turns out to be one of the great cinema characters of this or any other era. The out-of-sync disconnect between Bella's woman's body and her – accelerated – (re)learning of language and sexuality make her the perfect narrative device for a savage lampooning of social and sexual conventions as she puts forth boldly, and bodily, into the world. The film also sends up the inadequate men who both desire her and try to control her, one of whom is played with particular relish and comic distinction by Mark Ruffalo. Bella keeps slipping the leash to uproarious and hilarious effect, including linguistically by way of a range of off-kilter coinages (prepare to witness plenty of "furious jumping").

Male colleagues I spoke to were quick to label the film a transgressive feminist fable of female agency and self-determination, but another colleague, a woman and self-professed heterosexual feminist, was put off by the somewhat meagre specimens of masculinity the film ultimately deposits us with in its final moments. That discussion

OPPOSITE
Emma Stone as Bella Baxter in Yorgos Lanthimos's Golden Lion-winning *Poor Things*

BELOW
Nishikawa Ryô as Hana in Hamaguchi Ryûsuke's *Evil Does Not Exist*

will no doubt gather pace when the film is released more widely, but above all *Poor Things* is an exhilarating work of cinema, marshalling every visual and sonic resource at its disposal to create its own unique and totally immersive universe. It had by some distance the best music in the festival, by Jerskin Fendrix who comes out of the music scene centred on The Windmill pub on Brixton Hill in London (this is his first soundtrack, but there'll be many more for sure). His work here is bewitching and novel, managing to create otherworldly atmospheres to enrich and deepen the uncanny happenings on screen. Shona Heath and James Price deserve mention too for incredible work on the film's production design. Lisbon and Paris, two cities filmed to death, are here completely reimagined, visually and texturally. If this film isn't showered in Oscars for every department come March then the world is truly out of joint.

I'd assumed Stone would walk off with the Venice Best Actress prize, but in fact the jury awarded it to Cailee Spaeny, also excellent in Sofia Coppola's *Priscilla* as the eponymous wife of Elvis Presley. The film traces their relationship from the first meeting at a US Air Force base in Germany in 1959, when Priscilla is 14 and Elvis already a massive star, to their separation in the 70s. Attracted to her naivety, Elvis's respectful courtship shades gradually into something darker as the relationship develops, a desire to keep her fixed in a kind of imposed stasis, an element of which is his refusal to have sex with her. While he tours or makes films, Priscilla, a virtual prisoner in Graceland, suffers torments reading newspaper stories of his flings with starlets. Spaeny registers all Priscilla's pain with the minutest of touches, documenting her slow progression from awestruck schoolgirl to disaffected wife to helpless bystander. When the end arrives it's almost matter-of-factly, Elvis by now trapped in addiction and fame and Priscilla desperate for release. In fact, the whole atmosphere is low-key and subdued, even more than we're accustomed to from Coppola; and although it might seem effortless, this level of control and clarity and granular insight is surely anything but.

It was hard to disagree with the two other main award winners, Hamaguchi Ryûsuke's *Evil Does Not Exist* and Agnieszka Holland's *Green Border*, which were given the Grand Jury Prize and Special Jury Prize respectively. As a crucial election looms in Poland, the latter has unsurprisingly become a news item since the festival finished, attacked by right-wingers for its unstinting portrayal of the country's hardline response to the refugee crisis that unfolded on its forested border with Belarus in 2021, one engineered by President Alexander Lukashenko in response to sanctions for his country's support for Russia in its war on Ukraine. The focus of the drama is a Syrian family arriving by plane in Belarus, led to believe there will be a corridor for safe passage to Sweden where they'll meet relatives and seek asylum. In fact, like numerous others , they are simply shunted across the border into Poland by the Belarusian military, where the Polish army's response is equally brutal and they're either left stranded without food or shelter apart from what a few committed local activists can supply, or in some cases pushed back across the border.

Holland doesn't spare us any of the dehumanising horror or anguish that occurred (one estimate suggests 37 people have died since the disaster erupted); as well as the devastating impact on the Syrian family, we see the range of responses it elicits in local communities and the military and police dealing with the manufactured crisis. One woman, a psychologist, is radicalised by a child's death she witnesses and throws in her lot with the humanitarian activists doing their best despite obstruction by the authorities. After an opening aerial shot of the forested border in colour, the rest of the drama plays out in black and white, better for conveying a sense of moral murk and making the forest appear as threatening as it must to those forced to inhabit it. It's not groundbreaking cinema by any means, but it is a well-crafted film with a certain grim buttonholing integrity, one you watch with a mounting sense of horrified disbelief.

Cailee Spaeny registers all Priscilla's pain with the minutest of touches, documenting her slow progression from awestruck schoolgirl to disaffected wife to helpless bystander

ABOVE
Cailee Spaeny as Elvis's wife in Sofia Coppola's *Priscilla*

It must have been a tough jury decision between *Poor Things* and *Evil Does Not Exist* for the main prize, not only for their individual merits but also because they were the finest exemplars of two broad tendencies in the films I saw in Venice: one we might term 'legible', that concludes its narrative threads and character arcs neatly, and the other, seen in Hamaguchi's new film, which takes off in an unexpected direction in its final act and then heads out even further into the unknown with an enigmatic ending that seems to gather and distil all its various motifs into a highly concentrated, starkly elemental sequence. Not illegible then, but definitely not afraid to bed down with mystery and ambiguity, and risk alienating some viewers in the process. The former was by far the most prevalent type of film I saw in Venice, which made the latter even more welcome when it arrived late on.

Evil Does Not Exist came about as a short film to accompany music by composer

Evil Does Not Exist **is definitely not afraid to bed down with mystery and ambiguity, and risk alienating some viewers in the process**

Ishibashi Eiko, then developed its own life, but the plaintive music is still a prominent feature and indicator of meaning. The setting is a bucolic village a few hours from Tokyo, where a community of some six thousand live in harmony with nature, including taciturn woodcutter and handyman Takumi (Omika Hitoshi) and his eight-year-old daughter Hana (Nishikawa Ryô). But the idyll is under threat from corporate entities who want to install a glamping site with a septic tank that, it transpires, will poison the pure local water that some villagers depend on for their livelihoods. A brilliant set-piece consultation meeting where all this is laid out makes it clear that the villagers understand far better than the incomers how much destruction this will cause to local ecosystems.

But just as you think you've got a fix on what the film is about, the corporate drones who chaired the meeting, Takahashi (Kosaka Ryûji) and Mayuzumi (Shibutani Ayaka), are fleshed out and humanised. They return to the village beset by doubts over the plans and their own roles in implementing them, and some gentle comedy ensues in which Takahashi is shown by Takumi how to chop a log and announces a big life change. Then there's another unsettling narrative swerve into much darker, violent territory, foreshadowed earlier in the film by the sound of gunshots and Takumi's casual approach to time-keeping on the school run. Hamaguchi has crafted something rich and haunting here, adding new and potentially discordant notes to shake things up after the huge success of *Drive My Car* (2021).

There were three films about hitmen in the festival, all voiceover-heavy and all by heavyweight American directors. The less said about Harmony Korine's *Aggro Drift* the better, but David Fincher's *The Killer* is a meticulously directed, absorbing affair. Michael Fassbender is the dead-eyed, Smiths-loving protagonist fighting to retain control as his amoral worldview unravels after an unexpected glitch. Richard Linklater's *Hit Man* adopts a blackly comic register for its entertaining tale of a lecturer (Glen Powell, a co-writer with Linklater) with a sideline working for the police as a fake hitman trapping potential clients. When he manages to dissuade one such (Adria Arjona) from buying his services and starts a relationship with her, the compartmentalised strands of his double life bleed into each other in unpredictable ways. It ultimately becomes some kind of slapstick noir, a brilliantly scripted and executed riff on performance, identity, character and destiny.

There were two other biopics as well as *Priscilla* in this year's selection. *Ferrari*, directed by Michael Mann, stars Adam Driver as the Italian car entrepreneur dealing with grief and the entanglements of business and family, who needs his Ferrari team to win a big race to turn around his ailing company. Those race scenes are the most engaging element of the film, but on the whole it's relatively minor Mann. *Maestro*, directed by and starring Bradley Cooper, spans the greater part of composer Leonard Bernstein's life, but where Mann seems happier in the professional than the domestic arena, here it's Bernstein's close and complicated relationship with his wife Felicia (Carey Mulligan) that takes centre-stage, threatened by his extramarital affairs with younger men. It's an affecting, beautifully judged portrait of a marriage in crisis, both Mulligan and Cooper rising to the occasion with subtle, committed performances.

The other story of note at the festival, in the Critics' Week strand, was the success of the British debut film *Hoard*, directed by Luna Carmoon, which won three prizes. It's an urgent and passionately played tale of a teenage girl struggling with reawakened memories of her earlier life with her obsessive-compulsive single mother, before she was removed from her care and lost touch with her. Parallels with Charlotte Wells's *Aftersun* (2022) are marked – buried grief and trauma, the past flooding into the present, and a first-time woman director drawing on autobiographical material about a parent with mental health issues – but *Hoard* is very much its own peculiar and idiosyncratic thing. Saura Lightfoot Leon plays Maria in her teen years, sharp and smart but prey to longings and urges she can't process. She falls in with local binman Michael (Joseph Quinn), who shared the same foster mother and is equally damaged by his childhood experiences; the raw, haphazard psychodrama of their relationship is complicated by the fact he has a pregnant girlfriend. *Hoard* is about 20 minutes too long and uneven in parts, but it's depiction of working-class suburban south London felt lived-in and spot-on. Maria's unpredictability and wildness and unfiltered directness occasionally put me in mind of someone else. "You scare me," says one awestruck potential suitor to Maria, while she in turn dismisses him as a "Chislehurst posh boy". Bella Baxter might well have found a kindred spirit. ■

Ferrari is released in UK cinemas on 26 December, *Priscilla* on 5 January and *Poor Things* on 12 January. *The Killer* streams from 10 November on Netflix, which has also picked up *Hit Man*

BELOW
Saura Lightfoot Leon and Joseph Quinn in Luna Carmoon's *Hoard*

THELMA SCHOONMAKER: A PERSONAL JOURNEY THROUGH POWELL & PRESSBURGER'S MOVIES

A passionate custodian of the legacy of the great English director and Hungarian writer, the editor Thelma Schoonmaker, who was married to Michael Powell until his death in 1990, offers an insider's guide to the bewitching world of these giants of 1940s and 50s cinema

INTRODUCTION AND INTERVIEW BY PAMELA HUTCHINSON. ALL IMAGES FROM THE BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE AND THELMA SCHOONMAKER

The films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger have a shimmering, magical quality that distinguishes them from all others. The great run of films this pair made together as 'The Archers' began in the midst of World War II and continued through the austerity years, but they are romantic, musical, lustrous and bewitchingly supernatural – as well as sincerely internationalist. There's no better guide to them than Thelma Schoonmaker. The triple Oscar-winning editor was married to Powell from 1984 until his death in 1990. Since then she has been the custodian of his legacy, overseeing projects including his posthumous memoir, the restorations of his films and an English Heritage Blue Plaque at the Archers' former offices in London. Her creative partner Martin Scorsese (she has edited all his fiction features since 1980) is likewise a tireless champion of Powell and Pressburger's films (see page 58). Schoonmaker describes his devotion to preserving their legacy as "unstoppable".

I spoke to Schoonmaker in September, when she was deep in preparation for the release of *Killers of the Flower Moon*, but seemingly still on a high from Il Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna in June, which hosted a retrospective of Powell's early films. "It was so wonderful to screen the films with fresh audiences, particularly because that audience is so young there, and see that people were enjoying the films tremendously. I think Michael would've enjoyed that. Wim Wenders was sitting next to me laughing and [Cannes film festival director] Thierry Frémaux also." Many of these early films, made under the British 'quota quickies' system, meaning low budgets and short schedules, have been remastered and will screen as part of a major forthcoming BFI season. For all their cut corners, there's a tangible sense of Powell's talent in the verve and variety of these early films. Not for nothing did the *Observer* critic C.A. Lejeune write in 1931 that Powell's work "shows what a good movie brain can do within the strictest limits of economy".

It was as a teenager, shortly after her family moved from the Caribbean to New York, that Schoonmaker saw her first Powell film. It was *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) on TV. Of course, she never dreamed she would marry the man who made this romantic film. Her ambition was a career as a diplomat, but she swiftly learned her political views were too liberal: "They said, 'What would you do if you were in a cocktail party at the embassy in South Africa, and somebody asked you what you thought about apartheid?' I said, 'I would say it's terrible. It has to stop.' And they said, 'You can't do that until the government... decides they want to say that.' Well, that got me bounced." She took a summer course in filmmaking, where she met Scorsese. She recut his film *What's a Nice Girl like You Doing in a Place like This?* (1963), which had been mangled by a negative cutter, and they became friends, and collaborators. Scorsese introduced Schoonmaker to Powell when they were editing *Raging Bull* in 1979; shortly afterwards they moved in together, and five years later they were married. "I think I'm the luckiest person in the world," says Schoonmaker. "I would never have met Scorsese except for the fact that somebody miscut his negative. And I would never have met Michael if I hadn't been working for Scorsese. I've had so many lucky breaks."

ABOVE
Thelma Schoonmaker

OPPOSITE
Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger during the production of *A Canterbury Tale* (1944)

Living with Powell, Schoonmaker saw a side of the director others didn't. "He has a reputation for being tough on actors, but that was because when he was making films, it was a religion, he says. And if someone came on that set who didn't have that same feeling and didn't perform properly, he could be quite tough, from what I understand. I never saw that, never in the ten years I lived with him." Schoonmaker, who here guides us through her husband's career, recalls an indefatigable, endlessly imaginative man who refused to let the setbacks of his later career stifle his creative energy. "He made every second of every day count. I've never been around anyone like that since," she says. "He didn't waste a moment of any day. It was a joy to live with him because he was so full of life and never gave up."

REX INGRAM

"Michael's experience in France, working with an American film crew, was his first job when he was only 19, with the great Irish American director Rex Ingram [pictured above]. He said over and over again that that experience – with a very friendly American crew who allowed him to learn everything, camerawork, editing – is what gave him his feeling that he wanted to make films of vision and not just an ordinary story. He says that if he'd not had that experience, he doesn't know if he would've created the masterpieces that he did with Emeric.

"Ingram was an extraordinary filmmaker and had a deep, deep influence on Michael, much like Michael has had that deep influence on Scorsese. So it helps to be around geniuses."

'Rex Ingram was an extraordinary filmmaker and had a deep influence on Michael. It helps to be around geniuses'

RED ENSIGN (1933)

"In the 1930s Michael was making films that were sort of rip-offs of Hollywood films, but he put his own particular touch on them. It's quite obvious. There's tremendous humour, which Michael was obviously injecting. I don't think it was necessarily there to begin with. And you begin to really feel his special touch. John Laurie, for example, who's so magnificent in *The Edge of the World* [1937] and *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* [1943], he's in the early quota quickies, and you see Michael beginning to find out who the actors are that he really wants to work with, and it's great to see that."

Schoonmaker's favourite early Powell film is *Red Ensign* (pictured above), a 1933 drama about the beleaguered manager of a Glasgow shipbuilding firm "because of the strong performance by Leslie Banks and its evocation of what running a shipyard is like". It also has, she says, a "more interesting plot than some quota quickies".

THE EDGE OF THE WORLD (1937)

"I think he felt that these [very early] films were not coming from his heart. So he decided to chuck them all. That's when he decided to make his wonderful film *The Edge of the World* [pictured left], which he took a huge gamble on to basically produce himself, find the funding and take a very willing crew way out to an island where there was only a ferry that came every two weeks. They made this remarkable film with no helicopters, no electricity – they had generators – no roads, and they hauled these cameras up to impossible positions by sheer physical force.

"The film is just beautiful and it's a poem. Michael was finally making a film that he deeply cared about. It's just incredible. It was about humanity, which is what makes the Powell and Pressburger films so great anyway. They're about all human beings, not just UK citizens, but people all over the world.

"When Alexander Korda saw *The Edge of the World*, he hired him because he had another film he wanted to make, which wasn't made because of World War II starting, but he introduced him to Emeric Pressburger and then the great partnership thrived..."

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF COLONEL BLIMP (1943)

"It's my favourite of all the Powell and Pressburger films [pictured right]. I just adore it, and you never know what's going to happen in that movie. One of my favourite moments, I have to say, in all of the films I've ever seen, is the moment when Roger Livesey doesn't realise that he's in love with Deborah Kerr. Anton Walbrook, playing the German friend, has asked her to marry him, and she has agreed because she doesn't think Roger loves her. When they say goodbye, the way she looks when he holds her in his arms to say goodbye, and then she pulls back and kisses him on the lips, which is very strange to do in that kind of situation for the time, and steps back. He suddenly realises he's in love with her and he's lost her. It's one of the greatest moments in film as far as I'm concerned. There's no dialogue. It's just this intense emotional moment. And then, of course, he spends the rest of the film trying to find someone just like her.

"Michael asked me to put on his grave 'Film Director and Optimist', which I did. I think Roger Livesey was his alter ego in the movies. He has that bouncy, optimistic way of looking at things. It was a wonderful match for the two of them to work together."

'*The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* is my favourite of all the Powell and Pressburger films. I just adore it'

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH (1946)

"After Michael died and I was publicising the second part of his autobiography [*Million-Dollar Movie*, 1992], almost every venue asked for that movie [pictured left]. I was really surprised. Young men would come up to me afterwards and tell me how much they loved it. I mean, there were women too, but it was mostly young men, 20 years old or so. I wished Michael had been there.

"Michael really knew how to love, and that's what he's portraying there. When she [Kim Hunter's June] steps on that stairway to give up her life for him [David Niven's Peter], he would have done that for me and I would have done it for him."

'When Kim Hunter steps on that stairway to give up her life for David Niven, Michael would have done that for me and I would have done it for him'

THE RED SHOES (1948)

"Scorsese says that *The Red Shoes* [pictured right] is in his DNA. The gutsiness, the extraordinary artistic explosion in that film, is what guides him almost every day... I think Michael felt, because of his experiments in different kinds of ways of shooting things, that he wanted to do [the ballet sequence] to show what drives artists to the point sometimes of unhappiness or distraction, that this is what's going through their hearts and minds as they are dancing or performing an instrument or painting, this incredible intense exhilaration, and that's what makes them good artists. He has said the thing that was extraordinary about *The Red Shoes* is that it was just about art and nothing else.

"Melvyn Bragg asked him, on *The South Bank Show*, 'Why did you have to have her die at the end?' Michael said, 'Well, she was dying for her art.' And he said, 'I would do that too.' Bragg was taken aback by that, but he did die for his art with *Peeping Tom* [1960], actually, which is considered a masterpiece today. So, he wanted to show what that feels like to your ordinary audience. Emeric I don't think was as happy about it, but it's a huge influence on Scorsese and so many other directors. And I'm thrilled to hear that young people today know these films and love them."

GONE TO EARTH (1950)

"*Gone to Earth* [pictured right] is one I really wish people would see more. Jennifer Jones is so great in that movie, and Cyril Cusack, whom I just adore as an actor. Michael adored him too, and put him in every movie he could because Cyril was a conscientious objector during World War II and really not favoured for movies because of that.

"Michael knew the [Shropshire] landscape from visiting, and the way he evokes the land is beautiful, but also the folk beliefs, which can be dangerous and are dangerous for Jennifer Jones's character Hazel. He wanted to show that this very profound folk belief was still very important at the time that the novel was written [by Mary Webb in 1917, though the story is set in 1897]. Hazel is torn between the man she is married to – Cyril, a preacher – and the raging baron of the place [David Farrar] who is just after her for her body. The way she's torn between the two of them is beautifully displayed and the ending is incredible. It's very rich and lush and beautiful.

"Jennifer is just terrific. And she really had to learn how to handle the fox. There was a wonderful trainer who was helping her, but she had to learn how to hold that fox and be with it in difficult situations. I don't know her films really, but she's phenomenal in it."

BELOW
Concept art for *Peeping Tom* (1960) by Ivor Beddoes

PEEPING TOM (1960)

"What's so powerful is that you care about this man who was a murderer – so beautifully portrayed by Carl Boehm – but who has been created by his father to be a murderer. You care about him. The critics were horrified at that feeling in themselves. They thought, "Well, we must get rid of this film because people shouldn't be feeling that way." These days, many films are made like this. Michael wasn't even the first: Fritz Lang's *M* [1931] did something like this.

"I've just finished helping restore the movie, and I love the great detail and care that went into it to make that character someone you felt for. Michael completely changed the way he made films with this movie. A different cameraman and a different look – very much a 1960s look, even the colour, the way sets are designed, the way people wear clothes is very 1960s. It was a big thing for him, to jump ahead and make a film relevant to that time."

ON THE WOMEN IN POWELL'S FILMS

"The women are amazing in his movies. I think my personal favourite is the way Deborah [Kerr] is in *Blimp*. She is so commanding, and she was so young. In the first part, when Blimp first meets her, she says, 'Well, there's nothing left for me now to do, but go back to England. My family will want me to marry' – or something like that. And he says, 'Yes. Well, that's a good idea.' She says, 'How do you know that's a good idea? Are you a woman? Have you ever lived like a woman?' It's just fantastic how feisty she is. I just love it. And he says, 'Are you a suffragette?'"

"So I love her, and Wendy Hiller is wonderful in *I Know Where I'm Going!* [1945, pictured right]. She's just wonderful. Michael really loved women, particularly intelligent women, and that is seen very clearly in the films."

'Michael really loved women, particularly intelligent women, and that is seen very clearly in his films'

PEEPING TOM AND THE TEMPEST ARTWORKS © ESTATE OF IVOR BEDDOES/BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

THE UNMADE FILMS

Michael Powell made his final feature film in 1972 – *The Boy Who Turned Yellow*, for the Children's Film Foundation – but his archives contain artefacts from countless projects he tried to get made in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, including his most cherished idea, an adaptation of *The Tempest*, starring James Mason as Prospero and Mia Farrow as Ariel.

"*The Living Room* was a very, very interesting project. I have not read the script I'm ashamed to say, I'm so busy as a filmmaker. But it was Graham Greene's play and made the name of several actors, like Dorothy Tutin. Hein Heckroth did the most gorgeous watercolours for the sets. Michael worked very hard with Greene to write the script and did big location scouts in Bristol – the Clifton Suspension Bridge was going to be part of it – but they never could raise the money.

'To the end of his days, he was always thinking and dreaming of another project and also helping a lot of young people who had dreams'

"The other one that I particularly love is *Thirteen Ways to Kill a Poet*, which Michael tried for years to sell. It's wonderful because he has 13 different poets of all historical ages, and sometimes it would be that a poet dies because they've lost their talent or they lost someone they love. They don't have to be physically dead. It's a brilliant, brilliant idea. Scorsese fell in love with it and started gathering together his friends to be part of the directors who would make these 13 films for television.

"Michael was going to do Edgar Allan Poe. He was a huge fan and wrote a complete script. The method of death was to be 'burying him alive' and Christopher Walken was going to play Poe. Marty was going to do Ernie Kovacs, a famous, groundbreaking comic on television in the US who died while smoking a cigar and trying to tune his radio as he drove towards Malibu in California. I mean, it would have been great, but nobody was interested in it.

"He never stopped hoping that he would get one of these projects made, particularly *The Tempest*, which is the one he really wanted to make. I helped him type the scripts and tried to help get them sold. Instead of becoming bitter because of what happened to him in the film world, he never gave up.

"It's a remarkable example for people to follow. To the end of his days, he was always thinking and dreaming of another project and also helping a lot of young people who had dreams that maybe were never going to get made, but he loved the fact that they had that dream, and he would help them." ■

The retrospective 'Cinema Unbound: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger' screens at BFI Southbank, London, until the end of December. *I Know Where I'm Going!* is rereleased in UK cinemas on 20 October, *Peeping Tom* on 27 October, *The Red Shoes* on 8 December and *The Small Back Room* in early 2024. A BFI book, *The Cinema of Powell and Pressburger*, is published on 5 October and reviewed on page 98

THE LIVING ROOM PAINTINGS COURTESY OF THELMA SCHOONMAKER

'He never stopped hoping he would get one of these projects made. Instead of becoming bitter because of what happened to him in the film world, he never gave up'

LEFT & BELOW
Painter and art director Hein Heckroth's concept art for a proposed film of *The Living Room*, based on Graham Greene's play about a woman who has an affair with a married man. Powell wrote: "Their love is very physical, as love usually is in Graham Greene's world, and it should be as explicit as good taste and sense will allow in a modern film." Of the motel room (below) where the lovers meet, Heckroth wrote: "Maybe such effects can be achieved by photographing the reflection of different elements like water, fire, trees etc. and superimposed over the room... The vision fades slowly out and leaves a bare room."

ABOVE
A painting by Ivor Beddoes for the production design of Michael Powell's unrealised adaptation of *The Tempest*, which had been set to star James Mason as Prospero and Mia Farrow as Ariel

KINGS OF THE MOVIES: SCORSESE ON POWELL & PRESSBURGER

A new documentary drawing on the archives of Michael Powell, Thelma Schoonmaker and Martin Scorsese explores the magic of the duo's films. Here Scorsese talks to Philip Horne about his childhood memories of their films and the mysterious alchemy of their partnership

When I interviewed Martin Scorsese for the October issue of *Sight and Sound* about *Killers of the Flower Moon*, I took the opportunity to ask for his thoughts on Powell and Pressburger. He's one of their most impassioned advocates, combining scholarly knowledge and a career-long creative engagement with their oeuvre both together and individually. And in his touching 1991 foreword to Ian Christie's excellent 1985 book *Arrows of Desire: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger*, Scorsese picks out the one thing above all that makes them such an inspiration: "They were the only independent filmmakers who managed to work within the system and still get away with making truly experimental films."

He is therefore the obvious figure to act as guide in a new documentary, *Made in England: Martin Scorsese Presents Powell & Pressburger*. The documentary is directed by David Hinton, who co-directed a charming *South Bank Show* about Powell in 1986, the year the latter's eloquent memoir *A Life in Movies* came out. And Scorsese and Hinton are working in close collaboration with Powell's widow, the brilliant Oscar-winning editor Thelma Schoonmaker, who is committed to making sure the films of Powell and Pressburger continue to find new audiences.

When we meet, the only material still to be shot for the doc is Scorsese's own appearances. "Thelma's working on certain aspects of clips from certain films," he says

BELOW
Heaven in *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), which Emeric Pressburger suggested should be rendered in black and white

– and Scorsese has thought deeply about the art of the clip, as the maker of some magnificent documentaries on the cinema, from the epic *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies* (1995) to *My Voyage to Italy* (1999) and *A Letter to Elia* (2010, co-directed with Kent Jones). "It's very hard to clip these films," he says. "It's very hard to clip any film. People want to say too much in the clips and I explain, 'No, then what's the point of seeing the *movie*?'... I've thought about that a great deal... I'm being very, very careful with David and Thelma, saying, 'Let's *evoke* these films.' The real experience is *seeing* the film."

Scorsese's first encounter with a Powell and Pressburger film came on TV in the late 1940s with the magic of *The Thief of Baghdad* (1940); and in 1948, when he was just five, as he wrote in *Arrows of Desire*, "The first time I recall seeing the Archers' logo in colour was when my father took me to see *The Red Shoes* at the Academy of Music on 14th St. I was mesmerised... What I was really drawn to was the mystery of the red shoes, the hysteria of the picture, the extreme close-ups of Moira Shearer's eyes as she feels herself being borne to her death by the shoes, or is it by herself? This was shocking for me." *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951) he saw in a hacked-down black-and-white version on a strand called *Million Dollar Movie*, which gave Powell the title for his second, posthumous, volume of memoirs in 1992. Colour is an intense experience in the Archers' films, and Scorsese has recalled of *Black Narcissus* (1947): "When I saw their work on screen it was like being bathed in colour, it was palpable."

Meeting Powell resolved some mysteries, Scorsese recalls. "The extraordinary unique thing of their sharing a title was mysterious, to the point where we thought maybe they were pseudonyms for other filmmakers, because there was nothing written on them. We knew Sidney Gilliat and [Frank] Launder, and we also knew the Boulting brothers, but they weren't the same kinds of films. So these Archer films seemed to be something that from [*The Life and Death of Colonel*] *Blimp* in the 1970s – which was almost impossible, you couldn't really see it [until the 1983 restoration, it was only seeable much shortened, in black and white] – to *The Red Shoes* [1948], and *A Matter of Life and Death* [1946] as best you could see that too, that was in an edited version... all these films were very, very special. The big productions like *Tales of Hoffmann*, how come we don't know who made these movies? So that was the mystery until I got to England in '75, and met Michael."

The new documentary will investigate the mysteries of that collaboration. "It's a very complex piece. It has to be balanced and it's interesting, [in the screen credits for a number of their films] it's 'Written, produced and directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger.'" I suggest it's too easy to take the line that Pressburger wrote the scripts, then Powell rewrote the dialogue and directed them. Scorsese agrees. "It's not that. No, I don't think it is. And in order to really understand, as best you can, well, first of all, [you can read] the two volumes Michael wrote, and then the volume written on Emeric Pressburger [*Emeric Pressburger: The Life and Death of a Screenwriter*, by his grandson Kevin Macdonald, in 1994]. Then you take a look at the film and I think you get a good sense of it. I think what David has put together is fair and just.

"I mean, Michael's directing," he continues, "but on the other hand, well, Emeric came up with the idea of doing heaven in black and white in *A Matter of Life and Death*. That's a big, a *major* contribution."

After they met in London, Scorsese has recorded elsewhere, Powell saw *Mean Streets* (1973) and wrote to say "how much he liked it – except that I used too much red. 'Too much red?' It's all over *his* films and that's where I'd got it from!'" The meeting was the start of a developing friendship. "He became part of our lives, he was with us all the time... very close to my parents, pretty much every holiday, birthdays, et cetera, we'd celebrate, screen films from time to time. He was very much part of the family." In 1984 Powell married Schoonmaker and the intimacy was even closer for the remaining six years of his life. He admired and supported Scorsese, whom his posthumous memoir calls "a real king of the movies"; and he famously wrote the discouraged Scorsese a decisive letter in 1988 urging him to make *GoodFellas* (1990): "It is a stunning script, and will make a wonderful film, and a priceless social document."

'Michael Powell was a big supporter, particularly in some difficult periods I had in the early 80s. He was pretty much there in that period, without judgement... or at least he didn't let me *know* if he was judging!'

Personally, too, "he was a big supporter, particularly in some difficult periods I had in the early 80s – in '82, trying to finish *King of Comedy*. He was a person who would be able to talk with me in a way that was not judgemental; and had a way of saying things without saying them. As opposed to other people who were, at the time, making declarations and isolating me... I was having a difficult time... But he was pretty much there, in that period, without judgement... or at least he didn't let me *know* if he was judging!' Scorsese laughs at the thought.

When they met, Powell had already been, as he has continued to be, a presence and inspiration in Scorsese's cinema: there are minor characters called Powell and Pressburger in *Boxcar Bertha* (1972); Robert De Niro's Jimmy Doyle signs the hotel register in *New York, New York* (1977) as 'Mr. Powell'. The close-ups of Travis Bickle's face in *Taxi Driver* (1976) were shot at 36 and 49 frames per second, influenced by the shots of Robert Helpmann in the Venetian duel in *The Tales of Hoffmann*. The build-up to the duel in *Colonel Blimp* inspired the focus on the rituals of the ring rather than the actual boxing in *Raging Bull* (1980). Scorsese's commentary on the Criterion edition of *Black Narcissus* says the fluency and inventiveness of camera movement and framing of bodies and faces there directly influenced the scene in *The Colour of Money* (1986) in which Tom Cruise is moving round the pool table entering and exiting the frame; and that the handling of Deborah Kerr's Irish memories inspired the transitions by simple cuts between Rupert Pupkin's real experience and his fantasy life in *The King of Comedy* (1982). The trick he learnt from Powell: "Treat the fantasy as just as real."

Scorsese has been thinking about *A Canterbury Tale* (1944). I mention its extraordinary tone, as a playful pastoral comedy unfolding in Kent just before D-Day: everyone we see doing apparently frivolous things is touched by the war; many of them are about to go off to fight and very possibly die. Scorsese agrees, citing the scene in which Alison (Sheila Sim) sits on the grassy hilltop looking out over Canterbury. "*A Canterbury Tale* is magical. It's just the music [by Allan Gray] shifting, the shots of the cathedral from afar, as she sits in the grass, the listening to the... here's the past come up. It's something worth looking at...what the past means to us in our culture and our lives, and how it speaks to us. That, again, is like the landscape in *Archipelago* [Joanna Hogg, 2010]. Or the prairies out in Oklahoma, it speaks to you if you shut up and listen. And we did [on *Killers of the Flower Moon*]. Granted I come from Manhattan, but still it said *something*. I don't know what the hell it was, but it said it. But in *A Canterbury Tale*, the past speaks to you through the land. It's beautiful." ■

ABOVE
Martin Scorsese and Michael Powell

IMAGE: BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

PUTTING ON THE RED SHOES

As *The Red Shoes* is rereleased in the UK, alongside a BFI exhibition about it, we publish another entry from BFI film archivist David Meeker's posthumous diary. Here he recalls restoring the film and his friendship with Michael Powell

The Red Shoes was certainly one of the first films I remember having seen – I was taken by my ballet-loving mother to the Odeon Cinema, Swiss Cottage, on its release in 1948. As an impressionable 12-year-old schoolboy I was totally enraptured by the iridescence of Vicky Page, the ballerina so memorably realised by Moira Shearer. Little did I imagine then how involved I would become with so many of those who had created the film's magical world and the extent to which it would resonate around and around throughout my life.

Once I had started working with the British Film Institute in 1961 it wasn't long before I got to meet Michael Powell and we would chat whenever we ran into each other – usually at the Institut Français in South Kensington, where we would regularly satisfy our mutual thirst for French movies. He was in a poor state in those days, having lost the confidence of the film industry following their rejection of *Peeping Tom* (1960), and it was still some time before his 'rediscovery' by critics in France and Belgium in the early 1970s. At that time he was still living in Melbury Road, off Kensington High Street, in a large house that had been used for scenes in *Peeping Tom*. I recall borrowing a 16mm copy of Rex Ingram's *The Magician* (1926) from my good friend Philip Jenkinson and screening it for Michael at his behest. I believe this small gesture helped to cement our friendship, which was to last until his death.

Early one morning during the mid-1970s I took a call from my opposite number at La Cinémathèque française in Paris who could hardly conceal a blind state of panic. Michael and Emeric Pressburger were to attend a special screening of *The Red Shoes* (1948) at their Chaillot premises at 6 o'clock that evening, but our National Film Archive had sent them a nitrate copy, which they couldn't screen. As there was no safety copy available, he begged me to get hold of a 16mm print and bring it to Paris, PLEASE! I called the Rank Film Library immediately and asked them to locate their best quality copy and have it ready for collection. I dashed home, picked up an overnight bag and my car, drove to Brentford, collected the film and went on to Heathrow, where I was on the first plane to Roissy. Then the train to La Gare du Nord and the Metro to Trocadero, arriving around 5 o'clock. Michael and Emeric made their introductory speech and we went over the road to a brasserie for dinner. Michael was wearing his famous Sherlock Holmes cape, which amused the French no end. All in all, quite a fun day's work!

On 5 October 1983, the BFI held an exceptional dinner at the Guildhall in the City of London, attended by the cream of the British film industry. The occasion was to mark the Institute's 50th Anniversary, the presentation of a Royal Charter and to award the Institute's first Fellowships, to Orson Welles, Marcel Carné, Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger, David Lean and Satyajit Ray. As soon as the dinner was over the BFI's patron, Prince Charles, retired to meet some of the guests who were being selected for him by our director, Tony Smith, who, gesticulating wildly, shouted to me: "Grab those two women and bring them in to meet Prince Charles." That is how I came to be walking proudly through the crowd with Moira Shearer on one arm and Wendy Hiller on the other. All I could think about was that Vicky Page was holding on tightly to my right arm...

Shortly after I transferred into the National Film Archive in 1980 as its head of feature film acquisitions, it started serious work on a programme of achieving full colour restoration on its collection of original nitrate three-strip Technicolor negatives, with the aim of producing safety preservation material as well as a negative from which nigh-perfect projection positives could be produced. By 1985 this long-term – and vastly expensive – project was well under way, with the Technicolor films made by the Archers taking precedence. As leader of one of the restoration teams I made sure that our first major restoration of the year would be on *The Red Shoes*, for I knew later in the year Powell would be 80. What a way to give him a happy birthday if we could have the film ready in time for him to introduce on such a red-letter day. So I booked the appropriate 6.30pm slot on 30 September 1985 in National Film Theatre 1 for the occasion. Michael and his dear wife, Thelma Schoonmaker, duly turned up to be met by a full and enthusiastic house. I brought them on stage with me and announced that it was Michael's 80th birthday. As the applause died away, someone started singing "Happy birthday to you...", to be taken up immediately by the entire assembly. Michael just stood there glowing, his cheeks shiny red like a little boy's, with tears streaming down his face.

Michael told us he had fallen madly in love with Deborah Kerr when he was shooting *Colonel Blimp* and that 40 years ago he had asked her to marry him but had been rejected

Following this, a group of us went to Bentley's Restaurant in Swallow Street, which Michael had chosen for dinner. When the coffee and brandy had been served, Michael said he wanted to tell us something, something even Thelma didn't know. He told us he had fallen madly in love with Deborah Kerr when he was shooting *Colonel Blimp* in 1943 and that 40 years ago this very evening, on his 40th birthday, 30 September 1945, he had brought her to this restaurant and asked her to marry him but had been rejected. That's the reason we were there that evening. It was our turn to have tears in our eyes... and not for the last time where Michael was concerned.

On the morning of 15 February 1990 I answered the phone to Thelma, who informed me that Michael had died during the night and would I be kind enough to announce this to the press as she had so much to do. I duly called the Press Association, who must've done their job pretty quickly for the news got back to me within 30 minutes! A little later Thelma phoned again to ask whether I would be a pallbearer at Michael's funeral. I considered this a great honour. The funeral was held on 23 February in Michael's local church in the Gloucestershire village which had been his only real home for many years (he lived in a cottage left to him by Pamela Brown, another of his great loves). My fellow bearers were his friend and saviour from the 1960s, Frixos Constantine; a filmmaker who had directed a superior *South Bank Show* about Michael, David Hinton; and one of Emeric's grandchildren, Andrew Macdonald. As we left the church most of us were holding back tears, for the congregation was singing, "I know where I'm going" and as we headed gingerly towards the open grave, where Michael was to be laid next to Pamela Brown, all I could think of was that I was carrying on my back the man who, all those years ago, had created Vicky Page out of his imagination... and how the circle had finally closed. ■

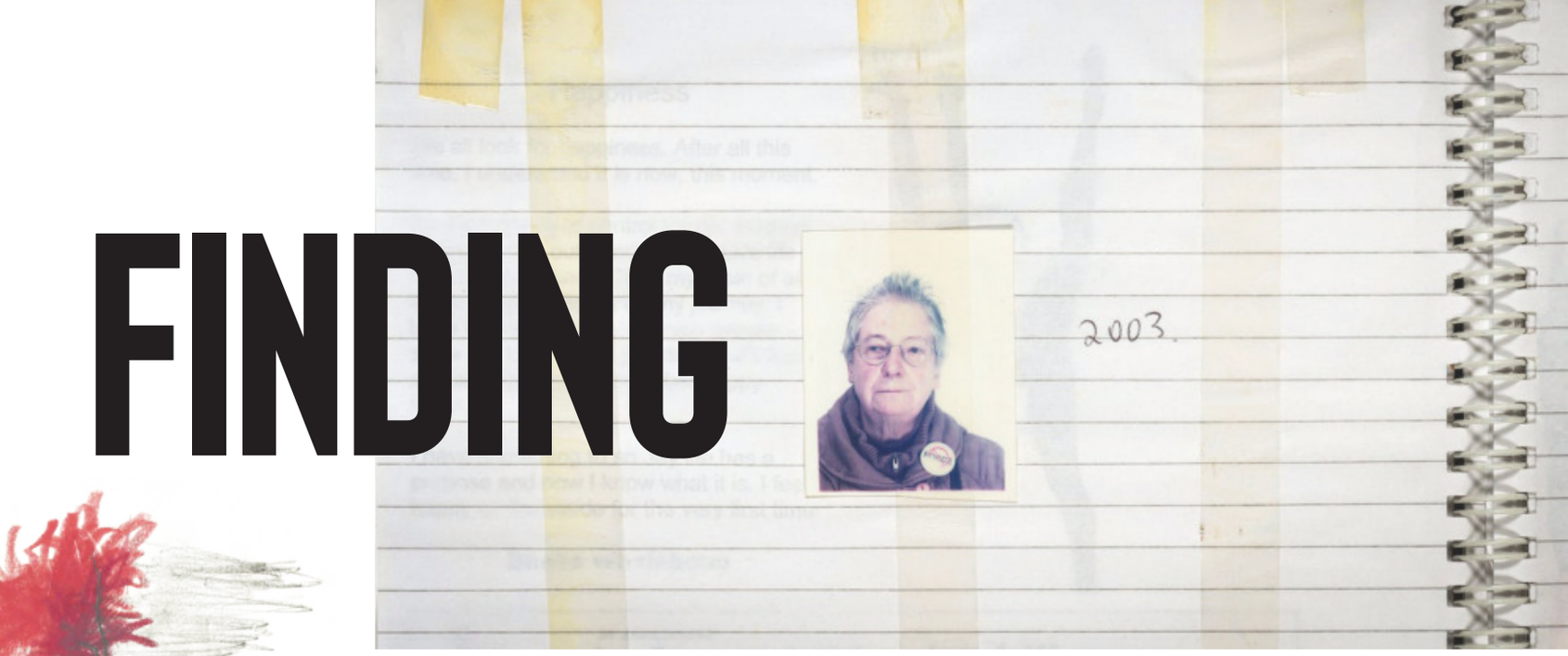
OPPOSITE
Moira Shearer as Victoria Page in *The Red Shoes* (1948)

BELOW
A production design sketch for *The Red Shoes* by Hein Heckroth

RED SHOES SKETCH: BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

'*The Red Shoes*: Beyond the Mirror' exhibition is at BFI Southbank, London, from 10 November to 7 January

FINDING AUDREY

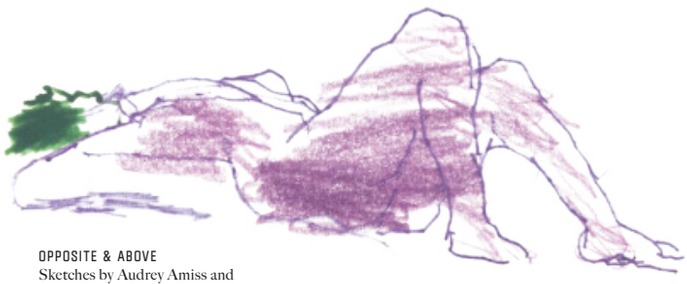


IMAGES: AUDREY AMISS ARCHIVE AT WELLCOME COLLECTION

A talented artist whose career was derailed by mental illness, Audrey Amiss left behind an astonishing archive of paintings and journals. Carol Morley draws on this in her latest film to create a portrait of a vivid, tragic, hilarious heroine

BY SINÉAD GLEESON

AMISS



OPPOSITE & ABOVE
Sketches by Audrey Amiss and pages from her packaging journals

BELOW
Carol Morley with items from the Wellcome Trust's Audrey Amiss archive

IMAGE: © WELLCOME COLLECTION/THOMAS FARNETTI

In 2015, filmmaker Carol Morley was working at the Wellcome Collection in London, having been awarded a Screenwriting Fellowship there – other recipients include *The Zone of Interest* director Jonathan Glazer and Sally Wainwright, the creator of *Happy Valley* (2014-23). While at Wellcome, Morley heard about a woman who collected the packaging of everything she ate; intrigued, she asked to see this woman's archive, which was in storage and had not yet been catalogued.

The woman turned out to be Audrey Amiss. Born in Sunderland in 1933, she attended Sunderland Art School and, later, the Royal Academy in London, where she was praised for her use of colour. After being diagnosed with schizophrenia, her art career faltered, so to support herself, Amiss took a typist job at the Ministry of Labour and later Stockwell Unemployment Benefit Office. She continued to submit to galleries, which consistently turned her down. None of this deterred her, and the volume of her output is staggering. As well as cataloguing food wrappers, Amiss logged every letter she sent, and all the money she spent and received, in a series of journals and diaries. Her archive is made up of 80 boxes and 50,000 sketches and paintings; on her passport she wrote her occupation as "Typist Artist Pirate King". But Amiss did not consider herself an outsider artist, writing to her sister Dorothy: "I was once in the tradition of social realism, also called the kitchen-sink school of painting. But I am now avant-garde and misunderstood."

There are parallels with the story of the street photographer Vivian Maier, who worked all her life as a children's nanny and never showed her photographs to anyone. She was discovered in 2007 when John Maloof, an aspiring historian and self-confessed flea-market obsessive, rummaging through boxes at an auction house in Chicago, found a large cache of negatives of black-and-white street scenes of the city, depicting ordinary lives; it took some detective work to identify the photographer. Often labelled an 'outsider artist' because of her DIY, non-college route into art, Maier (who died in 2009) has received considerable posthumous attention, with several exhibitions and no fewer than three documentaries – most prominently the 2013 feature *Finding Vivian Maier* – attempting to understand why she kept such an obvious talent under wraps.

Morley – who made her name with *Dreams of a Life* (2011), about a young woman who died alone in her flat in north London, and *The Falling* (2014), a claustrophobic story of obsession and mass fainting – has often depicted outsiders in her work; *Dreams of a Life* demonstrated, too, her ability to sensitively reconstruct the life of a stranger. She tells me how, when she first got to see Amiss's archive, the work was completely "raw and jumbled up", but she was determined to make a film about Amiss's life. The sheer volume of the archive proved a starting point. "I fell in love with the work and was excited to have the privilege to excavate the life of somebody who deserved recognition and seemed to leave so much behind with intention," says Morley. "I also felt like she had chosen me for the task of making her film... I fell in love with her art because of how she took the everyday and studied and transformed it. I completely adored her scrapbooks and how she kept everyday objects and annotated them, because Audrey Amiss saw value in what others pass by."

The film, *Typist Artist Pirate King*, is neither a typical biopic nor a documentary. Written and directed by Morley, with Monica Dolan in the title role, it's a re-imagining of Amiss's life. We see her alone in her flat in London – where her main contact with the world is shouting at neighbours who she claims are sexually assaulting her at night "via remote control" – and with an endlessly patient, and entirely fictional, psychiatric nurse, Sandra Panza (Kelly Macdonald, excellent as the understated foil). Spurred on by the belief that she's "not got long to live", Amiss fixates on entering an art competition back in her home town. She prevails on Sandra to drive her to Sunderland, which sets up a road movie structure within which the film can explore Audrey's past, her need for companionship and the daily reality of dealing with her mental health issues. The pair set off in Sandra's yellow electric car, 'Sunshine' – there's an immediate echo of the disharmonious pairing of John Candy and Steve Martin in *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* (1987). (Later, in another cinematic nod, the women pose for passport photos, and Sandra likens them to Thelma and Louise.) When Audrey causes the car to crash, they're forced to take a coach.

The film's episodic structure allows the audience to see how Amiss navigated the

world. In real life, she was often convinced that strangers were people from her past, so Morley threads the journey with figures familiar to Amiss: at a yoga class, she believes the teacher is her old headmistress; in a hotel, after trashing the reception area, she mistakes the policeman who comes to gently chastise her for her father. These scenes don't just serve as a historical window into Amiss's life – they are deeply empathetic. It's a theme that recurs throughout Morley's work: the importance of putting ourselves in the place of those whose lives differ from or are more complicated than our own. We are brought to the first psychiatric hospital Amiss stayed in, and stop at an Anglo-Saxon battle re-enactment, where she is crowned queen. Such incremental moments, thanks to Morley's subtle handling of chronology, show that Amiss's past was very much her present, with time coalescing in an often chaotic way.

The film shows Amiss in all her complicatedness – from her humour and talent to her public outbursts and accusatory meltdowns. In her journals, Amiss detailed her illness, describing herself as a "Mental Health Survivor". Morley is careful not to pin a diagnosis on her, and was mindful of the difficulties of portraying a real person with an already stigmatised illness.

"It's difficult to make a portrait of anyone, because you want to create a portrait that they would recognise. I wanted to make the film not 'about her' but 'of her', so to make a film that honoured her brilliant and delicate use of colour. Because Audrey left so much behind, I felt very equipped to tell her story. It was just about figuring out how I could put that into motion and navigate areas of mental health. It seemed to me I was creating a portrait of Audrey and that mental health was one aspect – and so if I stuck closely to her world-view she would show me the way."

With this kind of subject matter, there are tough scenes, but to Morley's credit – and thanks to a superb, feverish performance by Dolan – we see another side to Amiss: arch and wilful, but funny too. In the hotel Amiss trashes, she shares a room with Sandra, indicating that she's welcome to use Amiss's leftover bathwater, calmly noting that she has peed in it. When she eats a Quaver, the artist in her marvels at how it "catches the light". Throughout the film, the light and shade of her personality are expertly balanced, and Amiss is compelling company throughout.

Morley was keen to have the blessing of Amiss's family before starting this project. "As soon as I knew I wanted to make a film about Audrey, I met with her nephew and niece – Steve Weatherell and Kate Tunnicliff – who had inherited Audrey's collection. Later, I got an email from Audrey's sister Dorothy, who said, 'It's time I came on board.' I travelled to Wetherby to meet her and her husband John, and when I finished the screenplay I sent it to Dorothy, who wrote back saying, 'Thank you for giving me my Audrey back.'"

Dorothy (played by Gina McKee) is presented on screen as a key absence in Amiss's life. The sisters have become estranged, largely because of Audrey's unpredictable behaviour. In real life, they remained estranged, but in the film Morley brought them together. "I wanted the film to be about reconciliation – for everything in life. I suppose I wanted to do that for Dorothy and Audrey." Dorothy died as the film was being edited and did not see the finished version, but she visited the set and saw Audrey's flat. The film is dedicated to her.

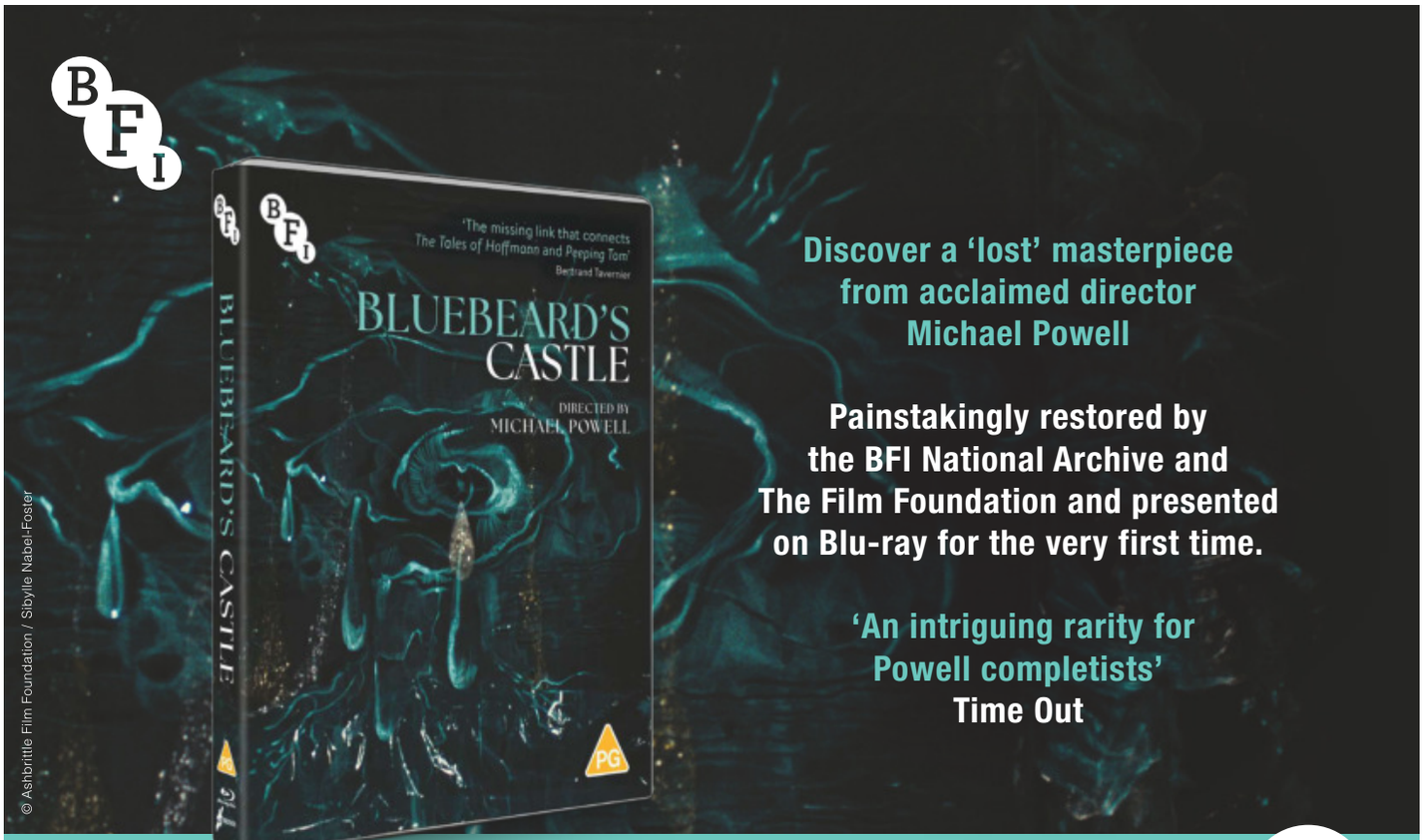
Morley wanted the film to have Audrey and her art at its centre, not her illness, and the viewer is reminded of this through regular appearances of her artworks. The title of one work sums her up: *Two Girls Talking, no time to draw the second girl*

The final scenes offer some closure, after this picaresque journey. Amiss wrote that a friend once compared her to Don Quixote – the name Sandra Panza is surely a nod to this. The film's fragmentary nature and frantic pacing mimic Amiss's experience of the world – Agnès Godard's cinematography keeps pace impressively. Carly Paradis's score instinctively knows when to recede and when to be declarative. Morley wanted the film to have Audrey and her art at its centre, not the illness she grappled with, and the viewer is reminded of this through regular appearances of her artworks. The title of one work sums her up brilliantly: *Two Girls Talking, no time to draw the second girl*.

In many ways, *Typist Artist Pirate King* is rooted in absences and denial: the care Audrey didn't get, the life she might have had with recognition of her talent. It highlights a broader societal issue: how successive governments have underfunded mental health provision, and how easily patients without full-time carers or close family can become isolated. There's a subtle but unmistakable swipe at an art world dismissive of working-class artists, especially if they happen to be women or unwell. Amiss's art and her fastidious cataloguing were a lifeline, an anchor that created certainty in a life often thwarted by conflicting realities. The film's title embodies this: the life and roles she actually lived and the ones she dreamed of. Myriad and complex, Amiss finally gets her due in this touching, compassionate film.

Typist Artist Pirate King is released in UK cinemas on 27 October and is reviewed on page 81

BELOW
Kelly Macdonald as Sandra Panza, Monica Dolan as Audrey Amiss in *Typist Artist Pirate King*



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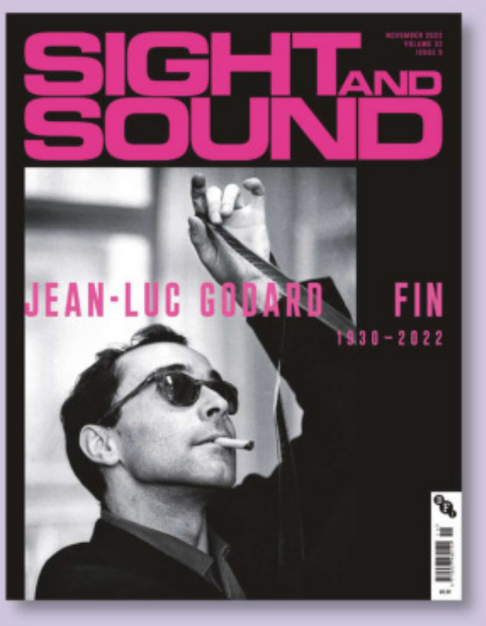

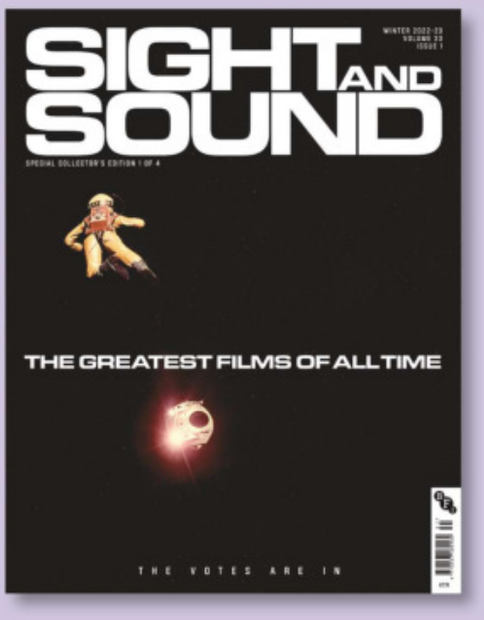

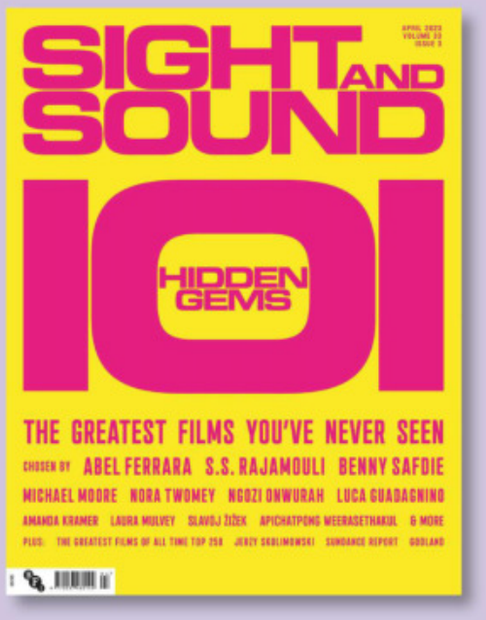

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KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON

USA 2023 CERTIFICATE 15 205M 40S

DIRECTOR	MARTIN SCORSESE
SCREENPLAY	ERIC ROTH MARTIN SCORSESE
BASED ON THE BOOK [*KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON: THE OSAGE MURDERS AND THE BIRTH OF THE FBI*] BY	DAVID GRANN
CINEMATOGRAPHY	RODRIGO PRIETO
EDITED BY	THELMA SCHOONMAKER
PRODUCTION DESIGN	JACK FISK
MUSIC	ROBBIE ROBERTSON
COSTUME DESIGN	JACQUELINE WEST
CAST	LEONARDO DICAPRIO ROBERT DE NIRO LILY GLADSTONE JESSE PLEMONS TANTOO CARDINAL

SYNOPSIS

An adaptation of David Grann's true-crime book about the abuse and mass-murder of members of the Osage tribe in the early decades of the 20th century, focusing on the interracial marriage of Native American Mollie Kyle and white settler Ernest Burkhart, and the machinations of Burkhart's uncle William 'King' Hale.

REVIEWED BY CATHERINE WHEATLEY

"Do you see?" "Do you understand?" "Look at me like this makes sense!"

Imagine these words spoken in the context of a Martin Scorsese film. Are they delivered by an ageing gangster: his head cocked slightly, his beady eyes narrowed above a rictus grin, first two fingers pressed against his thumb as he wags his upturned right hand at his nervous interlocutor? *Capeesh*?

You'd be right, in part at least. In *Killers of the Flower Moon* the last of these lines is spoken by Robert De Niro's William 'King' Hale, an avuncular monster who murdered members of the Osage tribe during what was known as the Reign of Terror – roughly, 1918-31 – when more than 60 Native Americans died in mysterious circumstances. Later it was revealed they had been slaughtered by white men for their money.

After oil was discovered on their land in the late 1910s, the Osage became some of the richest people in the world. Hale was at the arrowhead of a flock of white entrepreneurs who descended on Fairfax, Oklahoma, with a view to exploiting that wealth. These men and women staffed the Native Americans' vast mansions, sold them shiny new cars, and chauffeured them around, ran banks and medical surgeries: all jobs that seemed legitimate enough on the surface, but were ripe for corruption. As the film opens, Hale is already sitting pretty at the right hand of Native landowner Henry Roan. But like so many of Scorsese's avaricious antiheroes, he is hungry for more: more wealth, more power. So, he pays hitmen and bribes officials and skims off money from his employer, and eventually manipulates his dopey nephew Ernest Burkhart (Leonardo DiCaprio), recently returned from World War I, into marrying an Osage woman who stands to inherit a fortune.

Both De Niro and DiCaprio are working within their comfort zones, as is Scorsese, at least as far as the casting is concerned (De Niro has appeared in ten of Scorsese's films, DiCaprio in six: astonishingly, this is the first they've both been in – the pair haven't worked together since *This Boy's Life* in 1993). A volatile but charming mobster and a feckless, cocksure up-and-comer, they're an old-timey take on Frank Sheeran (*The Irishman*, 2019) and Jordan Belfort (*The Wolf of Wall Street*, 2013), a Midwestern version of Paulie Cicero and Henry Hill in *GoodFellas* (1990). When Hale takes his nephew to task over a botched hit, or shepherds him through a crowd while whispering schemes in his ear, the cadences, choreography and camera movements appear as uncanny interpolations of Scorsese's earlier works.

Killers of the Flower Moon is a western rather than a gangster film – Jack Fisk's expansive production design calls to mind his work on *Badlands* (1973) and *There Will Be Blood* (2007) – but it bears all

Here Scorsese finally excavates the legacy that his immigrant dramas have long kept buried. 'America' wasn't born in the streets, but on the broken bones of its native inhabitants

BARBERSHOP DUET
Robert De Niro as William Hale, Jesse Plemons as Tom White

the Scorsese hallmarks: the rise and fall narrative, the mirrored pair of male leads (DiCaprio was originally due to take the role of FBI good guy Tom White, now played by Jesse Plemons); the gangsters, patsies, informants and agents. There are sinuous, bravura tracking shots and bloody baroque tableaux, dripping with Catholic symbolism. At one point an incarcerated Hale leans into the light and the prison bars cast a crucifix-shaped shadow across his face.

And yet the film marks a significant shift for Scorsese. Until now his state-of-the-American-nation epics have mostly dealt in shades of white: think of the clash between Irish and Italian in *The Departed* (2006), for example, or *Gangs of New York* (2002). Charlie in *Mean Streets* (1973) dismisses a female dancer as "really good-lookin'. But she's black", and racial slurs abound in *Taxi Driver* (1976), *GoodFellas* and *Casino* (1995); but deeper consideration of race has been consigned to overseas places such as Tibet (*Kundun*, 1997) or Japan (*Silence*, 2016). Here the filmmaker finally excavates the legacy that his immigrant dramas have long kept buried. 'America' – that seething pit of greed and ambition – wasn't born in the streets, but on the desecrated bones of its native inhabitants.

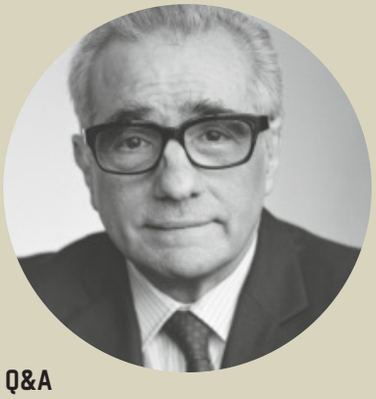
Slowly, from beneath the shiny carapace of authorial familiarity, another film emerges: one that is grave, delicate, wary. It is the story of the Osage themselves, forced to witness their own eradication and powerless to stop it. And at its moral centre is Lily Gladstone's Mollie Burkhart: a woman torn between the family she was born to and the one she has made. For all the fire-and-brimstone imagery, Scorsese's peculiarly Catholic sensibility is perhaps most visibly written on these bodies, and Mollie's in particular (the film's make-up team deserves an Oscar for the subtlety with which they paint shadows under her eyes and hollows in her cheeks). Forced to suffer inhuman torments, she not only endures, but forgives. It is Mollie who asks that quintessentially Scorsese question of her foolish husband. Can he see what is happening? Does he understand the stakes? In her voice, the words are not a threat, nor an admonition, but a plea. One senses Scorsese is treading gently around Mollie and her fellow Osage, taking pains to avoid an act of cultural ventriloquism (both metaphorically and literally: very little of the Osage-language dialogue is translated). The film's opening shot is of Osage hands and their voices are the first we hear. An early close-up of a pair of dark eyes – the eyes of an Osage child spying on a mourning ceremony – foregrounds their gaze. Throughout, Scorsese and editor Thelma Schoonmaker intercut black-and-white stills of the Osage people, dressed in their finery, glaring directly into the lens, while Gladstone's voice pronounces their names (and, sometimes, the cause of their deaths).

The film suffers from Mollie's absence in its final third. As it skips between the FBI investigation into Hale and Burkhart's crimes and the ensuing trial, it becomes overwhelmed by (mostly) white faces and meaty male performances, including John Lithgow and Brendan Fraser in two scenery-chewing turns as battling lawyers. Gladstone gets one last heartbreaking, suspenseful final scene, however, in which she powerfully shuts down any suggestion that ignorance excuses complicity: that is, if we don't see what's before us, it's because we choose not to. Indeed, such wilful blindness is what Hale is counting on: as he breezily assures his nephew, soon enough, "all this" – that is, the massacre of an entire people – will be yesterday's news.

An extraordinary coda seems at first to bear him out, riffing on Western society's salacious appetite for true crime and the Hollywood tendency to exploit the suffering of victims for entertainment, from which Scorsese is by no means exempt. But the film's closing moments throw up a cinematic mea culpa of sorts, as one final, unexpected voice addresses us. And in a closing visual flourish, the camera pulls up, out and away from an image of the Osage, suggesting not so much a God's-eye view as a final admission that we can only ever see, understand or make sense from a distance.

In UK cinemas from 20 October

SCORSESE PORTRAIT: BRIGITTE LANGOMBE



Q&A

MARTIN SCORSESE

DIRECTOR

BY PHILIP HORNE

Q As in *The Irishman*, your main character starts by coming back at the end of the war... So he's seen things.

A My thing was that we don't know what he's seen, and who are we to judge at that point?... Rather than going off and saying, "Oh, the war did it." No, no, he's who he is. But he has gone through certain things, and coming back from a war, particularly the war to end all wars supposedly, maybe he wants to stay in the pool room.

Q And the way we see him, the first thing he does is have a little drink from his hip flask, isn't it?

A Constantly drinking. Constantly. That's the other thing. All drink, there's nothing, or hardly anything to do. They're not reading George Eliot. They're playing pool. And it's a dry state. [Oklahoma] was dry before Prohibition because it's a crazy place.

Q De Niro and DiCaprio actually learned the Osage language for the film, and there were Osage learning it at the same time?

A It was wonderful. Chad Renfro [the Osage Nation's ambassador to the film] had put us together with all these people... whose parents were affected so strongly by the cultural disaster that had occurred that they don't know how to speak Osage. They don't remember the rituals. And so we were rediscovering with them, like the burial scenes, the food on the coffin, the youngest of the family walking over the coffin of the eldest, all these things.

Q Do you still have wide interests beyond the cinema?

A The curiosity for me is there for literature and cinema and for the whole *world* now. Do I have the time left, if I haven't even caught up with Dante? I'm trying to...

20 DAYS IN MARIUPOL

CERTIFICATE 18 94M 3S

DIRECTOR	MSTYSLAV CHERNOV
WRITTEN BY	MSTYSLAV CHERNOV
FILMED BY	MSTYSLAV CHERNOV
EDITED BY	MICHELLE MIZNER
MUSIC	JORDAN DYKSTRA

SYNOPSIS

A documentary about the war in Ukraine told from the perspective of the besieged inhabitants of the south-eastern port city of Mariupol, a key Russian target. Footage filmed by Associated Press cameraman Mstyslav Chernov and colleagues captures the period between 24 February and 14 March 2022, from the start of the invasion to a successful evacuation of civilians.

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL BROOKE

The telegrammatic title of Mstyslav Chernov's queasily riveting film refers to the time that he spent in the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol between Russia's initial invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and his successful evacuation 20 days later. In between, he was part of a team (alongside photographer Evgeniy Maloletka and producer Vasilisa Stepanenko) trying to record as much of what was happening in Mariupol as possible, relying on increasingly sparse internet access to get it to the outside world. (Chernov filmed 25 hours of footage but was able to transmit only half an hour to his Associated Press editors from Mariupol itself, at one point reduced to transmitting ten-second chunks via his mobile phone.)

The importance of his footage is repeatedly highlighted by the excerpts shown of global news stations making use of it, and by the fact that its visceral power rattled numerous Russians (including foreign minister Sergei Lavrov) into trying to smear his work as 'fake news' performed by 'crisis actors'. But nobody watching this significantly extended cut of the same material could sensibly believe that it's staged.

It's very much on-the-ground reportage, with a wider perspective provided only via occasional brief news-channel montages. Vladimir Putin announces the commencement of the euphemistically titled 'special operation' at the start, but it's nearly an hour before we see Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy – and only briefly. With access to information conduits curtailed or cancelled outright (and the possibility that their informants might be Russians trying to mislead them), the film deftly captures the widespread confusion at the sharp end. A particularly memorable shot, which might have been adorably funny in a different kind of film, is of a guinea pig desperately running as if its life depended on it, but with no idea where to go.

TRIAL BY FIRE
20 Days in Mariupol

All too often, the guinea pig's human counterparts are no better informed. The film is particularly good at capturing the fog of war through paradoxically pin-sharp high-definition images. To begin with, Chernov and his colleagues blithely assure worried residents that the Russians won't shell domestic buildings, until they do. (To their credit, they later apologise on camera to the people they initially misled). Seeking follow-ups to the heart-rending human stories that they've captured demands persistence and detective work, often culminating in confirmation that the person they're tracing has not survived. Chernov has years of experience covering conflicts in his native Ukraine, but the sheer force of Russia's 2022 onslaught took him as much by surprise as it did Mariupol civilians.

Throughout, Chernov (who narrates in English) wrestles with similar dilemmas to those discussed in David and Jacqui Morris's outstanding documentary *McCullin* (2012). But that film consisted of a retrospective interview with the great war photographer Don McCullin, whose conflict-covering years were by then well behind him; here, Chernov is seen having to make similar decisions on his feet, with planes flying overhead, bombs going off and screaming victims being treated by surgeons who are running out of painkillers and electricity.

Some of Chernov's subjects don't want to be filmed at all, others agree reluctantly and won't give their names, while still others – notably the doctors at the hospital where Chernov's images are at their most unflinching – encourage him to film as much as his memory cards will permit. One doctor even gives an impromptu speech in Ukrainian and English, hoping that his message will make it to the outside world. Other moral issues are raised when a woman berates her compatriots for taking advantage of the chaos to loot her shop – she shames one man into abandoning a child's football (itself a grim reminder of what happened when a teenage football game was shelled early on), but by this point she's been virtually cleaned out.

"Whoever wins the information war wins the war", we're reminded part way through, and Chernov's film is a scorchingly vivid testament to the importance of first-hand information. Indeed, he regrets being evacuated, as there was clearly much more that could have been recorded, but what he captured is potent enough. It's an intensely upsetting film, frequently showing the kind of images that TV news editors understandably shy away from broadcasting (although the faces and other identifying details of injured victims have tactfully been blurred), but this is never for gratuitous shock value. Like McCullin before him, Chernov fully understands his ethical responsibilities, however hard they may be to apply in practice under literal fire.

In UK cinemas now

CHILE FACTOR Jaime Vadell as Augusto Pinochet

EL CONDE

DIRECTOR	PABLO LARRAÍN
WRITTEN BY	GUILLERMO CALDERÓN PABLO LARRAÍN
CINEMATOGRAPHY	ED LACHMAN
EDITOR	SOFÍA SUBERCASEAUX
PRODUCTION DESIGN	RODRIGO BAZAES
MUSIC	JUAN PABLO ÁVALO MARISOL GARCÍA
COSTUME DESIGN	MURIEL PARRA
CAST	JAIME VADELL GLORIA MÜNCHMEYER ALFREDO CASTRO PAULA LUCHSINGER

SYNOPSIS

The vampire Augusto Pinochet – former dictator of Chile – invites his wife and children to his remote lair to divide the spoils of his regime. Carmencita, an exorcist nun disguised as a forensic accountant, sets out to destroy Pinochet, but the situation is observed from afar by his equally monstrous mother.

REVIEWED BY KIM NEWMAN

The Chilean director Pablo Larraín's *Jackie* (2016) and *Spencer* (2021) have shadows that blur distinctions between biopic and horror film; in his world, Princess Diana is literally haunted by Anne Boleyn and the House of Windsor is a crumbling edifice which neighbours the House of Hammer. Returning to his homeland, Larraín ventures even further from realism by imagining the late dictator Augusto Pinochet as a vampire. *El Conde* embeds a lot of genuine Chilean 20th-century history in an old dark house gothic tale shot in stark black and white featuring literal flights of fancy – its vampires fly superhero-style with spread cape wings – and bursts of extreme carnage which represent the many crimes of the Pinochet regime.

This approach isn't unprecedented. Ever since Bram Stoker used elements of the life of the historical Vlad the Impaler as backstory for his fictional count in 1897, many have imagined famous figures (Richard III, Judas, Hitler, Lenin) as vampires. *El Conde* even brings in a British politician often depicted in cartoons as a bloodsucker to narrate the story, making editorial links between the general behaviour of corrupt authoritarians and the habits of film vampires. "This is what the Count achieved," we are told. "Beyond the killing, his life's work was to turn us all into heroes of greed." In Larraín's telling, Pinochet (Jaime Vadell) is born Claude Pinoche in pre-Revolutionary France. His natural bloodlust leads him to lick the guillotine blade after Marie Antoinette's execution and treasure her severed head as a relic and a reminder to be an eternal counter-revolutionary. Coming to Chile, and living the biography familiar from history books, he achieves what Dracula failed to do by rising to power and exulting in rapaciousness. Having bled the country dry, Pinochet fakes his death and lives on, surrounded by minions and grasping heirs in a remote, bleak compound.

The vampire killings start again, leading the Catholic Church to send Carmencita (Paula Luchsinger), a nun who poses as an accountant, to gather the papers that will enable Pinochet's non-vampire wife and five children to live off money stolen from the country. Her mission isn't quite as idealistic as that of Jonathan Harker in Terence Fisher's *Dracula* (1958), who poses as a librarian hired to catalogue the library of Castle Dracula in order to get close enough to Dracula to assassinate him; the Church was at best neutral and at worst complicit with the Pinochet regime and Carmencita is as much a cover-up artist as a vampire slayer. She piques the old monster's interest, setting in motion events that summon Pinochet's monstrous creator and patron to the southern tip of the country for a reckoning and a reset which reinforces the lesson that fascism can't easily be despatched with a stake and holy fire. Vampires always return for bloodier sequels.

A rather beautiful film, *El Conde* explores its crumbling haunted house and bleak environs in a stately manner but also splashes around deep black sludgy blood (these vampires favour hearts liquidised in a blender). It's less the classical grey look of *Nosferatu* (1922) or *Dracula* (1931) than the retro-noirish monochrome of 1990s vampire essays like Michael Almereyda's *Nadja* (1994) and Abel Ferrara's *The Addiction* (1995). Some of the humour is laboured and – as is often the case with vampire political cartoons – there's a sense the joke-teller doesn't quite realise how often this one has been told before. Longtime Count-followers will remember H.W. Geissendörfer's *Jonathan* (1970), one of the first explicitly anti-fascist vampire movies, while even the throwaway *Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter* (2012) covered some of this territory.

In Stoker's *Dracula*, the Count is a vain, windy bore who boasts of his former military achievements – while justifying such heroic tactics as fleeing the battlefield to fight again, leaving his armies to be slaughtered. Here, *El Conde* similarly puts up a front, surrounded by icons of 19th-century militarism (it was said that Pinochet had "the last Prussian army in the world"). He's stung more by being remembered as a thief than as a mass murderer. As with Larraín's other portraits of political figures trapped in their pasts – the widowed Jackie Kennedy, the powerless Diana – an element of whimsy creeps in. Vadell gives almost a sympathetic portrait of the shambling living corpse, until deep malice glints again. The undead Pinochet of *El Conde* may be terrible, but we despise his enablers and hangers-on more... and it turns out that he's not even the worst vampire in the world.

On Netflix now

THREE MORE TOTALITARIAN VAMPIRE MOVIES

BY KIM NEWMAN

JONATHAN (1970)
Hans W. Geissendörfer stages key tableaux (gorgeously shot by Robby Müller) from *Dracula* filtered through the Third Reich. The Hitler-mimicking Count (Paul Albert Krumm) rants at his followers and swans about in a stylish high-collared cape but rarely gets his fangs dirty as a cadre of brutal human thugs enforces his rule and sees off threats to his regime.

THEY'VE CHANGED FACES (1971)
Corrado Farina reimagines Dracula as a politically connected visionary tycoon played by a literal Bond villain, engineer Giovanni Nosferatu (Adolfo Celi – Largo in *Thunderball*, 1966). The Jonathan Harker figure – a mid-level executive up for promotion – is lured to the vampire's gothic yet high-tech country estate, where the children of the night are a prowling pack of Fiat super-mini cars.

STRIGOI (2009)
When Vlad (Catalin Paraschiv) tells his grandfather not to leech off him in his sleep, the old man (Rudi Rosenfeld) angrily proclaims, "It's *my* blood – I gave it to you!" Faye Jackson's Anglo-Romanian film is a post-Ceauşescu small-town black comedy, melding seldom-seen lore (hearts have to be cut out and burned to destroy these vampires) with Romania's chequered 20th-century history and an Eastern European cynicism about the self-serving chancers who prosper under any oppressive regime.

FAIR PLAY

CERTIFICATE 18 113M 14S

DIRECTOR	CHLOE DOMONT
WRITTEN BY	CHLOE DOMONT
CINEMATOGRAPHY	MENNO MANS
EDITOR	FRANKLIN PETERSON
PRODUCTION DESIGN	STEVE SUMMERSGILL
MUSIC	BRIAN MCOMBER
COSTUME DESIGN	KATE FORBES
CAST	PHOEBE DYNEVOR ALDEN EHRENREICH

SYNOPSIS

Newly engaged couple Emily and Luke are financial analysts at the same high-stakes hedge fund but must keep their relationship under wraps to avoid breaking company rules. A sudden promotion for Emily creates tension for the couple and eventually sends their relationship into a bitterly violent downward spiral.

REVIEWED BY CAITLIN QUINLAN

The question of what something is worth – financially, professionally, romantically – is pushed to extremes in American filmmaker Chloe Domont's debut feature *Fair Play*, a pacy workplace thriller fired up by sex and spite. Incisive and slick, with plenty of the stylings of prestige TV (it's no surprise Domont's previous directing credits include episodes of dramas such as *Suits*, 2019, and *Billions*, 2022), the film examines the incompatibility of fragile masculinity and career competition through the poisonous relationship of a young couple.

Emily (a compelling Phoebe Dynevor) and Luke (an impressively stormy Alden Ehrenreich) work for the same hedge fund, where company policies force them to keep their relationship secret. Office machinations play out through snappy phone calls replete with financial jargon and impassioned glances across the room as stocks and shares rise or fall; the pair mostly keep their distance, taking different routes between work and home and leaving no hints of their love for each other. And supposedly they do love each other, with Luke's marriage proposal at the beginning of the film a sign of their commitment even though, when they leave their apartment each morning, they barely bid one another goodbye. This professional coldness becomes personal when Emily is promoted instead of Luke and his battered ego sets him on a destructive path. Still, Dynevor and Ehrenreich's chemistry is undeniable, even if, by the end of the film, their angry encounters are more memorable than their sexual ones.

Domont's approach is much less interesting formally than narratively (unlike, say, Kitty Green's 2019 office thriller *The Assistant*, in which the clinical colour palette and claustrophobic framing were key to the storytelling), but the decision to place this story of romance and sexual politics in the world of corporate finance is effective. With the stakes already so high, the atmosphere of tension around the couple is both grounded in reality and suitably dramatic. But it hinders *Fair Play* in some ways: films about women fighting for respect in the workplace, where sleazy colleagues swap frat bro stories at office drinks, feel a little dated since their 1980s heyday.

Where the film's gender commentary grows more interesting is in the breakdown of Emily and Luke's relationship. When Emily is promoted, the seemingly quintessential 'nice guy' (niceness made clear early in the film by his willingness to have sex with Emily while she's on her period) reverts to cynically misogynistic arguments – that Emily must have slept with the boss, or that she's merely a diversity hire. This is where Domont's film finds its more enticing contemporary angle, by looking under the surface of Luke's efforts to succeed in his work and relationship and exposing their rotten core. Before long, he's buying into a leadership training package run by a quasi-Jordan Peterson figure whose book encourages him to "live by his own rules".

Emily's emasculation of Luke, at first accidental and later very much intentional, is handled even more adeptly as she provokes his own self-debasement, leaving him to inflict much of the damage himself. It's her way of asserting herself – something Luke said she was incapable of doing. But she's also spent a long time making herself smaller for the sake of men, and Domont is astute enough to let some of these habits reappear as Emily figures out this new landscape. She's careful not to offer to pay for things for Luke, keenly aware of her new financial power over him, and she never lets her boss's phone calls go unanswered, even in the early hours. This makes the thorniness of Emily's position all the more interesting, as she assimilates into a circle of macho colleagues, and she emerges as not so much the expected hero of the film as a player fundamentally complicit in the toxicity of their world.

It's a film that begins and ends with the sight of blood, a portrait of a world that encourages ruthlessness and eats up the meek. Bitterness becomes violence, and even when things turn darker towards the conclusion, the finale proves spikily satisfying rather than tonally jarring, its sinister edge neatly reiterating which way the balance of power has swung. Domont might have the male ego in her crosshairs, but in addressing the wider causes and effects of this misogynistic landscape, her impressive debut skilfully picks off broader targets, too.

In UK cinemas now and on Netflix from 13 October

A FINANCE ROMANCE
Alden Ehrenreich as Luke, Phoebe Dynevor as Emily

SMOKE SAUNA SISTERHOOD

ITALY/FRANCE/ICELAND/ESTONIA/USA/SWEDEN 2023
CERTIFICATE 15 88M 56S

DIRECTOR	ANNA HINTS
WRITTEN BY	ANNA HINTS
CINEMATOGRAPHY	ANTS TAMMIK ANNA HINTS
EDITORS	HENDRIK MÄGAR TUSHAR PRAKASH QUTAIBA BARHAMJI MARTIN MÄNNIK ANNA HINTS
MUSIC	EÐVARÐ EGILSSON EETER

SYNOPSIS

In a cabin in the forest a group of unnamed women gather to take part in a series of smoke saunas, a traditional Estonian bathing ritual, over a number of years. In the process, the women talk to one another about their lives, finding healing and connection through sharing their stories and secrets.

REVIEWED BY RACHEL PRONGER

The word 'intimate' is too often attached to films; Anna Hints's mesmeric documentary *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood*, however, truly earns that descriptor. The film unfolds entirely within and around a wooden cabin in the forest, where a group of women take part in the smoke sauna, a bathing ritual originating in south-east Estonia. Inside the hut a stone-covered, chimney-less stove fills the space with smoke and the women gather naked in the heat. Sweating in the darkness they share their deepest secrets and hidden shames; it becomes clear that the sauna is about purifying the soul as much as the body.

Hints was inducted into this tradition by her grandmother and her insider's perspective is central to the film's warmth and candour. She does not pander to outsiders, using no voiceover and few intertitles. She places the viewer inside the ritual without contextualisation, asking us to watch and listen as the smoke gradually works its magic. As the women begin to talk, the difficult conversations that unfold – about body shaming, breast cancer, childbirth, abortion and grief – provide the film's thematic meat. Interludes in which the voice of an older woman is heard, her silhouetted face obscured by shimmering smoke, connect these testimonies to ancient tradition, reminding us that the struggles of which these women speak are – the odd giggling reference to dick pics aside – eternal ones.

It's a testament to the resourcefulness of Hints and her team, particularly cinematographer Ants Tammik, that *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood* captures so viscerally the interior of the cabin. A single sauna can last four hours, and the challenges of filming within a tiny space at lens-shattering temperatures while maintaining the trust of the participants, who are laying themselves bare physically and emotionally, are clear. Most of the women did not wish to show their faces, so Tammik and Hints focus instead on tight close-ups of other body parts – a back beaded in sweat, a dangling foot, a perspiring buttock – lit by glowing coals or gentle shafts of daylight. It's not always clear who is speaking; often their testimonies float above deindividualised images of hands, torsos and limbs, edited in slow, deliberate sequences. The dissection of headless women's bodies is often in cinema a hallmark of the male gaze, but here this approach does not objectify. Instead, the overall effect is a vivid sweat-drenched embodiment of the sauna's spirit – a collective physical experience which transcends the individual in favour of sisterhood.

In Estonian culture, the smoke sauna is considered a living entity with its own voice, singing and chanting along with those who sweat within its walls. To make her sauna speak, Hints works with sound designer Huldar Freyr Arnarson, composer Eðvarð Egilsson and her own folk band Eeter, crafting a visceral, otherworldly soundtrack. As befits a film that explores the porous boundaries between body, soul and earth, atmospheric musical compositions blend with recordings of natural soundscapes – sizzling hisses, ghostly exhalations, and measured breaths. Meanwhile Hints performs traditional chants alongside the women, powerful mantras – "Become strong, become powerful!" "We sweat out all this pain! We sweat out all this fear!" – which express the ritual's emancipatory power.

Such empowerment does not come easily. The discussions we overhear are sometimes harrowing – one description of a sexual assault is deeply distressing – and this unvarnished approach is reflected in Hints's candid, unromanticised aesthetic. Loving shots of imperfect bodies are reminiscent of the joyful fleshiness of a Jenny Saville portrait, while the way the women merge with the trees, water and foliage that surround the cabin brings to mind the semi-obscured forms of Ana Mendieta's land art. Like those artists, Hints captures images of women's bodies and the environment which are beautiful but also raw and powerful. Saunas are also used to smoke meat: in one sequence the women hack at a bloody pig's carcass with an axe, hanging the pork above benches usually occupied by sweating human bodies. The film opens with a similarly resonant image: a woman standing on the surface of a frozen lake, striking at it with a spade, attempting to break through the thick ice.

Smoke Sauna Sisterhood was shot over the course of seven years, but because Hints provides no time markers beyond the gradual changing of the seasons, we never quite know where we are in this chronology. Just as when sweating in a sauna, we might lose track of the passing minutes, the film suspends us in a liminal space, sequestered away from the modern world. By the end, that frozen lake has thawed; amid the lush surroundings the women float – weightless, unburdened, free.

In UK cinemas from 13 October

CABIN CREW *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood*

Q&A

ANNA HINTS

DIRECTOR

BY KATIE MCCABE

You mentioned that the idea for *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood* started when you were 11. Can you say more about that?
Not the idea for the film, but the impulse... My grandfather had just died. And his body was in the house, it was one day before the funeral. We went to smoke sauna, because this is what you do... I was 11. And it was there my granny confessed that grandfather had betrayed her and lived with another woman for some time... She released all these emotions and shared this experience and time kind of stopped, we were there just witnessing... I felt that grandma had made peace with my grandfather.

Watching the film, so much art came to mind – baroque artists, Caravaggio, but also the work of the feminist painter Jenny Saville. Did you have artists in mind when you were filming?
When you say these names, yes, they make sense! I was not directly thinking of those artists, but I think when I talked with the cinematographer, they came through. But the challenge for us was: OK, I have the female bodies and they're naked; how to show them without objectification and without sexualisation? Because that's very important, that the nakedness of the smoke sauna is not anything sexual... In Estonia, we're kind of OK to see people naked. There is a way to go in terms of emotional nakedness.

Did it create an issue at all, having a male cinematographer in that space?
No, we did a test shoot, with the subjects, and nobody felt bad... They were totally trusting, trusting him and trusting me... We had an agreement [with the subjects] that they would only sign and give their permission in post-production, when they saw the cut. So it could have been that somebody is filmed, and says no. It was important for me that I should not persuade anyone, because persuasion is also like manipulation... I believe that you can do bold and intimate and powerful films without abuse.

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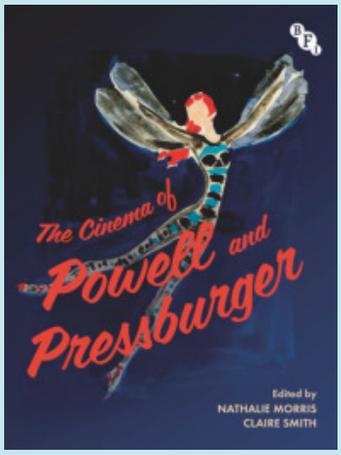

THE CINEMA OF POWELL AND PRESSBURGER

Edited by Nathalie Morris and Claire Smith, British Film Institute, 216pp, Hardback, £30.00, 250 colour images, 9781838719173

Delving into their magical and obsessive worlds, this lavishly-illustrated publication presents fresh perspectives on the filmmaking duo, shining the spotlight not only on them, but also on their circle of talented collaborators. Thelma Schoonmaker, Caitlin McDonald, Alexandra Harris, Mahesh Rao, Sarah Street, Ian Christie and Marina Warner write about the key figures who shared Powell and Pressburger's creative journey, and Tilda Swinton, Tim Walker, Sarah Greenwood, Michelle Williams Gamaker, Sandy Powell, Joanna Hogg and Stephen Jones reflect on the ways in which Powell and Pressburger's stories and images have haunted and inspired them in their own work.

The Cinema of Powell and Pressburger draws on the BFI's stunning design and archive collections, as well as key objects held in other public and private collections.

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THE RED SHOES

BFI FILM CLASSICS

By Pamela Hutchinson, British Film Institute, 112pp, Paperback, £12.99, 60 colour images, 9781839026065

Endlessly fascinating, dark and bright, *The Red Shoes* (1948) remains a beloved, if unsettling and often divisive, classic. Pamela Hutchinson's study of the film examines its breathtaking use of Technicolor, music, choreography, editing and art direction at the zenith of Powell and Pressburger's capacity for 'composed cinema'. Through a close reading of key scenes, particularly the film's famous extended ballet sequence, she considers the unconventional use of ballet as uncanny spectacle and the feminist implications of the central story of female sacrifice.

Hutchinson goes on to consider the film's lasting and wide-reaching influence, tracing its impact on the film musical genre and horror cinema, with filmmakers such as Joanna Hogg, Sally Potter, Martin Scorsese and Brian De Palma having cited the film as an inspiration.

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I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING!

BFI FILM CLASSICS

By Pam Cook, British Film Institute, 104pp, Paperback, £12.99, 58 B&W images, 9781839023811

I Know Where I'm Going! (1945) is widely regarded as a cinematic *tour de force*. A simple moral tale set in the wild Scottish Highlands, it follows the journey of a headstrong young woman forced by her encounter with this magical, mythic world and its exotic customs to revise her materialistic priorities. Pam Cook traces the film's production history, exploring its place in Powell and Pressburger's canon and showing how it wove into its narrative the memories and aspirations of an international group of film-makers working in 1940s Britain. Focusing on the extensive use of special effects, she reveals a technologically ambitious masterpiece. *I Know Where I'm Going!* is, for Cook, a multilayered work rich in allusions whose emotional power reaches beyond boundaries of time and place to touch profound human desires.

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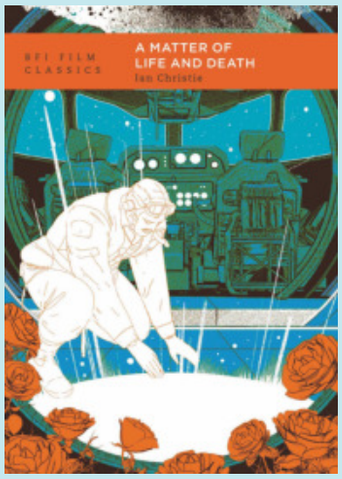

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

BFI FILM CLASSICS

By Ian Christie, British Film Institute, 112pp, Paperback, £12.99, 60 colour images, 9781839023897

Powell and Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) is a magical, profound fantasy and a moving evocation of English history and the wartime experience, with virtuoso Technicolor special effects. Ian Christie's study of the film shows how its creators drew upon many sources and traditions to create a unique form of modern masque, treating contemporary issues with witty allegory and enormous visual imagination. He stresses the teamwork of Powell and Pressburger's gifted collaborators, among them Director of Photography Jack Cardiff, production designer Alfred Junge, and costume designer Hein Heckroth, and explores the history of both British and international responses to the film. Christie argues that the film deserves to be thought of not merely as one of the greatest achievements of British cinema, but of all cinema.

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ADVERTISING FEATURE

THE PIGEON TUNNEL

UK/USA 2023

DIRECTOR	ERROL MORRIS
WRITTEN BY	ERROL MORRIS
BASED ON THE BOOK BY	JOHN LE CARRÉ
CINEMATOGRAPHY	IGOR MARTINOVIĆ
EDITED BY	STEVEN HATHAWAY
PRODUCTION DESIGN	PETER FRANCIS MARK SCRUTON
MUSIC	PHILIP GLASS PAUL LEONARD-MORGAN

SYNOPSIS

A documentary about the late spy novelist John le Carré, built around an extended interview with the then 88-year-old at home, and illustrated with dramatised sequences as well as archival images and film clips. Topics span le Carré's errant parents, elite education and teaching, experience of Cold War spying and craft as a writer.

REVIEWED BY NICK BRADSHAW

A good spy, John le Carré tells us midway through Errol Morris's interview portrait, is difficult to recruit. They should have an independence of spirit yet be looking for "institutional embrace" – in other words, dissemble for a higher duty; reinvent themselves yet always return home. "I see my life," adds the novelist, who famously left the secret service but built his fiction on spycraft, "as a series of embraces and escapes." In his telling, both in his 2016 autobiography *The Pigeon Tunnel* and here, such slippages were his childhood legacy. A con man father and a mother who ran out when he was five taught him the fallacy of stability and the "feeble membrane" between acclaim and shame.

Like le Carré (born David Cornwell), Errol Morris is drawn to men of power – first-hand testimony on history-making, the inside (but still blinkered) perspective on policy and its chaotic consequences drive his trilogy of encounters with American string-pullers: *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara* (2003), *The Known Unknown* (2013) with Donald Rumsfeld, and *American Dharma* (2018) with Steve Bannon. In all three, Morris sought not to prosecute his single interview subjects but to give them a hearing.

Here, facing a fellow artist and interrogator of power, he is at his most amenable: seemingly conducted chez le Carré across sessions at his desk and dining table, the conversations have the polished affability of a prestige magazine profile, with le Carré's glamour rubbing off on Morris, getter of big-fish interviews. (This was le Carré's final interview, recorded a year before his death in 2020.) In a self-aware preamble, the pair discuss the nature of interrogation and interview and the need to provide for your questioner's expectations. "This is a performance art," le Carré says. And if Morris doesn't know what he's looking for? "Then we'll struggle on and find out who you are." Morris used to say the Interrotron, his speaker-to-camera interview set-up, enabled "true first-person" documentary. In *The Pigeon Tunnel*, it could equally be called a Reflexotron.

At the same time, le Carré was a man who had accrued some power of his own – and the will as well as the skill to control his own narrative. This is Morris's second nonfiction adaptation/profile, after *A Brief History of Time* (1991), and among its layers is the hint of a commissioned or authorised work. As well as repeating and reflecting on stories from his autobiography, le Carré reads extracts. As there, he closes off talk of his love life in two sentences, whereas his biographer, Adam Sisman, claimed le Carré conducted affairs "like espionage operations, running women as if they were agents", the tension feeding his writing. While reviewers saw the autobiography as a counter to Sisman's book, or a "pre-emptive strike against posterity" (Robert McCrum), le Carré gives Morris a suavely obliging performance, broaching new topics with "no defensiveness because I don't know what the accusation is". The film is produced by two of le Carré's sons – who themselves may have mixed feelings about their father's legend.

An impressionistic patchwork in structure, Morris's film is all fragments and canted angles in its framing and dressing: mirrors making multiple le Carrés; noirish dramatisations in shallow focus. There's a physical claustrophobia and an emotional distance in these mini plays: a car boot closing on baby David as his parents flee the bailiffs; school and workplace scenes in long corridors, walls closing in. Le Carré's title refers to an indelible image from his childhood of clifftop tunnels laid from a Monte Carlo casino his dad took him to, funnelling pigeons towards the skyline where "well-lunched" gentlemen awaited with shotguns; surviving pigeons would loop home to begin the game again.

Le Carré waxes lyrical on the thrill of duplicity that hooked Cambridge spy Kim Philby and casts terse judgement on his "evil", a rare hint of his increasingly forceful political outlook. But it's the blood betrayals of Ronnie Cornwell, the inveterate fraud and fib-spinner of a father, that the film spirals back to, le Carré's first source of self-doubt. What lies beneath such fabulists – behind the smoke and mirrors of all our competitive storytelling? Can we find our way to a more illuminating self-knowledge – to an "inmost room" of secret truth and revelation – or are our hopes for reaching light as pitiful as the pigeons'? Morris stages the final story of le Carré's book, 'The Last Official Secret', a parable of treasure locked deep in the heart of MI6. The quest is a red herring.

In UK cinemas from 20 October

SMILEY CULTURE John le Carré

THREE ECCENTRIC FILMS BY ERROL MORRIS

BY NICK BRADSHAW

FAST, CHEAP AND OUT OF CONTROL (1997)
Morris's first two features, *Gates of Heaven* (1978) and *Vernon, Florida* (1981), relished their respective portraits of pet-cemetery entrepreneurs and swamp-town oddballs. His fifth goes all-out with a quartet of misfit experts – a lion tamer, a topiarist, a mole-rat collector and a robot-bug designer – and builds a deeply affecting tribute to discovery, adaptation and the intrepid creativity of life.

TABLOID (2010))
After a double punch of US imperial horror in *The Fog of War* (2003) and *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), Morris blew off steam with this recap of the life adventures of late 1970s beauty queen turned alleged sex kidnapper Joyce McKinney, later back in the news when a Korean scientist claimed to have cloned her pet dog. The truth may be a chimera but Joyce's endlessly fecund self-rationalisations are marvellous.

WORMWOOD (2017)
Morris's six-part, nearly four-hour Netflix series starts in the high-political history of secret CIA Cold War drug experiments, with the mystery of army scientist Frank Olson's deadly fall from a New York hotel window in 1953. His son Eric, then nine, has devoted or sacrificed his life to seeking answers, in a tale that mixes *Alice in Wonderland* with Hamlet.

FOE

CERTIFICATE 15 110M 8S

DIRECTOR	GARTH DAVIS
WRITTEN BY	IAIN REID GARTH DAVIS
BASED ON THE BOOK BY	IAIN REID
CINEMATOGRAPHY	MÁTYÁS ERDÉLY
EDITOR	PETER SCIBERRAS
PRODUCTION DESIGN	PATRICE VERMETTE
MUSIC	OLIVER COATES PARK JIHA AGNES OBEL
COSTUME DESIGN	ALICE BABIDGE
CAST	SAOIRSE RONAN PAUL MESCAL AARON PIERRE

SYNOPSIS

2065: Junior and Henrietta live in an isolated farmhouse in the American Midwest. Junior is selected to work on an orbital colony to which humanity is migrating to escape ecological collapse. Hen is offered a clone of Junior as a companion in his absence – with unexpected consequences.

REVIEWED BY SAM DAVIES

Isolated clapboard farmhouses in the dustbowl Midwest suggest certain things cinematically: slow-burn, unspoken family tensions; abduction by flying saucer; dust-storms whisking you to other, magical worlds. At different times Garth Davis's *Foe* evokes them all, framing its science-fiction fable about identity, AI and cloning in widescreen pioneer vistas, but retaining all the interpersonal claustrophobia of recent revisionist westerns like Jane Campion's *The Power of the Dog* (2021).

As the film opens, a car prowls down a dark lane and stops with a farmhouse in its headlights. Its passenger, Terrance (Aaron Pierre), is the storm, arriving at Junior and Hen's farm to whisk Junior off-world. What he offers – and the offer cannot, it turns out, be refused – is pioneering, heroic construction work in space, building humanity an escape route from a planet in terminal ecological decline. To sweeten the deal, Terrance's corporation can offer a clone of Junior as an emotional prop for Henrietta, his wife.

All is not entirely well with Junior (Paul Mescal) and Henrietta (Saoirse Ronan) to begin with, and the indecency lurking in the details of this proposal knocks their marriage that little bit more off-kilter. Henrietta wants to grow rather than let things fall apart, but may also want a different life: Junior even suspects she volunteered him for the whole scheme. When Terrance returns to run Junior through a series of increasingly uncomfortable psychometric tests – apparently straight from the same textbook as the Voight-Kampff questionnaire in *Blade Runner* – the dynamic becomes steadily more fraught. The urbane Terrance, with his imperturbable English accent, bottles of wine and knowledge of Jacqueline Du Pré recordings, is an intruder, employer, analyst, and also a glimpse for Hen – who plays a piano that Junior has banished to the farmhouse basement – of a world beyond her drab locale.

Adapted from Iain Reid's novel by Davis and Reid (who previously wrote Charlie Kaufman's *I'm Thinking of Ending Things*, 2020), *Foe* achieves a subtle, pervasive sense of unreality – or unreliable reality – which echoes the theme of copying, cloning and authenticity. Junior and Henrietta live in a barren dystopia as devoid of context or connection as of moisture and vegetation: family and friends are never mentioned, nor the possibility of children of their own. They seemingly live slightly out of time, in a 19th-century farmstead with barely a sign of 2023 – let alone 2065 – technology. They sleep on wrought-iron bed frames, and own a turntable, but not a computer or TV. Davis uses CGI judiciously to add detail rather than entire environments – such as long shots of the gigantic silo-like battery chicken facility where Junior works. Otherwise Davis and cinematographer Mátyás Erdély lean towards *Days of Heaven*-style wide shots of huge open skies and scrubland stretching to the horizon.

But *Foe* is dogged by unrealities that jam the logic of its plot. You wonder why Hen needs a spare Junior at all if he's returning in a year or two – and what exactly she thinks will happen when he does and meets his doppelganger, like a Martin Guerre back from orbit? *Foe* makes only glancing use of one of the easiest uncanny effects cinema can offer, the meeting of original and copy, which drove a clutch of films a decade ago (Denis Villeneuve's *Enemy*, Richard Ayoade's *The Double*, both 2013). Wouldn't Terrance's shadowy public corporation be better off sending disposable clones to do the heavy lifting in outer space, rather than doing the messy work of emotional labour on Earth? Hen's wish to escape the cultural and emotional desert she is stranded in makes sense – the fact that it is the reluctant Junior who hits escape velocity is a nicely dramatic discord. But it is framed oddly as an urge to travel a world which we are frequently reminded is dead or dying. It's to Ronan and Mescal's credit that the film is not overwhelmed by these flaws – or at any rate, interrogation is postponed until the credits have rolled. Both are able to let all the various nuances of emotion in a scene or situation flicker across their faces within the space of a line, and they can switch a mutual spark on and off at will, to match the uncertain voltage of Junior and Hen's marriage. And both performances only become more impressive after a late plot reveal that revises their characters for the audience yet somehow stays true to their interpretations.

In UK cinemas from 20 October

COPY THAT
Saoirse Ronan as Hen, Paul Mescal as Junior

THE MIRACLE CLUB

UK/IRELAND/USA 2023 CERTIFICATE 12A 90M 25S

DIRECTOR	THADDEUS O'SULLIVAN
SCREENPLAY	JIMMY SMALLHORNE TIMOTHY PRAGER JOSHUA D. MAURER
BASED ON A STORY BY	JIMMY SMALLHORNE
CINEMATOGRAPHY	JOHN CONROY
EDITOR	ALEX MACKIE
PRODUCTION DESIGN	JOHN HAND
MUSIC	EDMUND BUTT
COSTUME DESIGN	JUDITH WILLIAMS
CAST	LAURA LINNEY KATHY BATES

SYNOPSIS

Dublin, 1967. Lifelong friends Lily and Eileen, and their younger friend Dolly, enter a parish talent contest and win tickets to Lourdes. Each has a reason to hope for a miracle. At the last moment Chrissie, who used to live in the town, returns from America and chooses to accompany them, despite evident hostility between her, Lily and Eileen...

REVIEWED BY PHILIP KEMP

ROSARY AND TIME Maggie Smith as Lily

Sentimental 'Irish' charm plays a major role in *The Miracle Club*, directed by Thaddeus O'Sullivan, whose *December Bride* (1990) and *Nothing Personal* (1995) offered less anodyne takes on Hibernian society. This tone is set from the opening scene, with John Conroy's camera gliding gently over Dublin Bay to Edmund Butt's melodious score, before closing in on Lily Fox (Maggie Smith) standing tearful, flowers in hand, before a plaque commemorating the death by drowning 40 years earlier of her son Declan. Below the plaque stands a statue of the Virgin Mary.

We'll be seeing a good many more of these pale-blue-clad Blessed Virgins during the film, especially once the action moves to Lourdes, where Lily, her friends Eileen (Kathy Bates) and Dolly (Agnes O'Casey), along with Chrissie (Laura Linney) – Declan's lover, newly returned to Ireland – are making a pilgrimage, hoping for miracles. At one point Lily surveys a store stuffed with 'holy' pendants, badges, bracelets, statues and the like: "I thought Our Lord hated all that when he chased them out of the temple," she mutters.

There other occasions where a note of scepticism is sounded ("It's a con, it's a sham!" Eileen rants after being dunked in one of Lourdes' freezing water-troughs); but on the whole religion gets off lightly, especially in the person of the local priest, the tolerant and benevolent Father Dermot Byrne (Mark O'Halloran), who set up the talent contest that enables the women to travel to Lourdes, and accompanies them there. It's worth recalling that O'Sullivan's film is set in the same period as Peter Mullan's *The Magdalene Sisters*, 2002, which gave a less rosy picture of Irish society and the Irish Church in the 1960s. Chrissie – who, we learn, fled to the States when she got pregnant by Declan – may well have narrowly escaped servitude in a Magdalene Laundry.)

Father Dermot apart, the male characters are largely caricatured as helpless incompetents. "Who's goin' to have to do the cookin' and the cleanin' and mindin' the chislers?" Eileen's husband Frank (Stephen Rea) protests on being told she's off to France, and we see Dolly's husband George (Mark McKenna) make a ludicrous botch of changing a nappy. Veering from these scenes of broad comedy to exploration of the emotional rifts between the women (cleared up rather too readily to reach the feel-good ending), the film never establishes a consistent tone. Still, the performances of the four female leads go a long way towards redeeming the weaknesses of the script.

In UK cinemas from 13 October

'They've been lying all their life – that's how they got what they got. This is just how white people do'

SILVER DOLLAR ROAD

SILVER DOLLAR ROAD

DIRECTOR	RAOUL PECK
CINEMATOGRAPHY	KATIE CAMPBELL MAYETA CLARK
EDITOR	ALEXANDRA STRAUSS
MUSIC	ALEXEI AIGUI

SYNOPSIS:

Documentary telling the story of an African-American family's fight to continue living on the 65 acres of North Carolina farmland they inherited as 'heirs' property' in the 1970s, as white developers seek to exploit legal loopholes and evict them from their home.

REVIEWED BY SIMRAN HANS

PROMISED LAND Members of the Reels family

When Mitchell Reels died in 1970, he left his family a gift. Suspicious of legal paperwork and the white men who tended to handle it, he eschewed a proper will, instead bestowing on his descendants 65 acres of North Carolina waterfront, forest and farmland that he himself had inherited via an 'heirs' property' law – which in the absence of a will gives family members an interest in the land without formally establishing their ownership. Two of his heirs, Melvin Davis and Licurtis Reels, had lived at Silver Dollar Road their whole lives, until in 2011 they were taken to court by greedy property developers and sent to prison for eight years, for 'trespassing'. This documentary from leftist Haitian filmmaker Raoul Peck (*I Am Not Your Negro*, 2016) grapples with why Black landownership matters, and the ways in which it has been systematically thwarted.

The film draws heavily on – and gives due credit to – reporting by journalist Lizzie Presser, whose long-form piece about the Reels family was published on the ProPublica website and in the *New Yorker* in 2019. Peck's main intervention is centring the family's experience, ensuring they are able to author their own story. Matriarch Gertrude, her granddaughter Mamie and Mamie's niece Kim are his key narrators, revealing the saga's personal toll on the family as part of a wider political malaise.

Interviews with key family members are interwoven with (a few too many) drifting drone shots of dense green forest, sun-bleached fields and white sandy beaches, as well as archive footage of Black farmers, family photographs of golden summers, and evocative snippets of the Reels' home movies. Shaky mobile phone footage filmed by Mamie in 2011 shows police officers and property developers circling one of the Reels' properties like vultures, two months after Melvin and Licurtis were jailed. Mamie panics from behind the camera as her uncle Billy asks the men what they're doing. "They've been lying all their life – that's how they got what they got. This is just how white people do," she shouts, voice rising.

A concluding title card declares that "heirs' property laws disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minorities, low-income and rural populations", bluntly spelling out the film's campaign. But raising awareness isn't necessarily a call to action. More rousing is Peck's choice to end the film on a downbeat note, allowing Licurtis, now in his sixties, the final word. "They took the best years of my life," he says tearfully, as Peck crosscuts a sit-down interview with a heartbreaking shot of Licurtis entering his modest single-storey home.

In UK cinemas from 13 October

LIES WE TELL

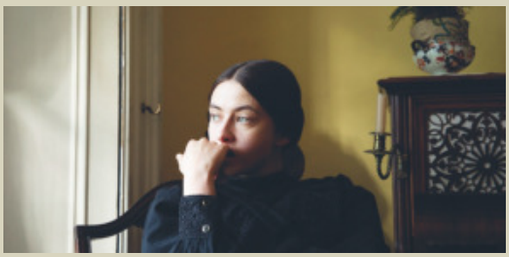
IRELAND 2022

DIRECTOR	LISA MULCAHY
WRITTEN BY	ELISABETH GOOCH
INSPIRED BY THE NOVEL *UNCLE SILAS* BY	J. SHERIDAN LE FANU
CINEMATOGRAPHY	ELEANOR BOWMAN
EDITOR	WERONIKA KAMINSKA
PRODUCTION DESIGN	CAROLINE HILL
MUSIC	AZA HAND
COSTUME DESIGN	JOANNE O'BRIEN
CAST	AGNES O'CASEY DAVID WILMOT CHRIS WALLEY

SYNOPSIS

Maud Ruthyn is orphaned at 18 and left the family fortune. Her Uncle Silas and two cousins arrive. Silas, suspected of murder and in debt, hatches schemes against Maud. When her cousin Edward tries a more forthright attack, Maud launches a desperate plan to save her own life.

REVIEWED BY ROGER LUCKHURST



HEIR CON Agnes O'Casey as Maud Ruthyn

Lies We Tell is a free adaptation of Sheridan Le Fanu's classic 1860s 'sensation novel' *Uncle Silas*, made in Ireland by the seasoned director Lisa Mulcahy. Mulcahy has worked in this territory before, directing the five-part BBC adaptation of *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins in 2016. She brings an unflashy TV proficiency to this crisp reduction of Le Fanu's Victorian melodrama, aided by a strong female production team.

Agnes O'Casey plays Maud, orphaned at 18 and heir to the family's country seat and her father's fortune – Ardgillan Castle in County Dublin proves a fine location. A minor, Maud must have guardians to run the estate, bland local professionals, and as a woman she has little legal control over her situation. This gets worse when her disgraced Uncle Silas, once accused of murder, arrives with two petulant grown children and a governess, all with evident designs on Maud's wealth. Her guardians and servants are turned away and Maud becomes a prisoner of women's legal circumstances. O'Casey's portrayal of Maud's mix of defiance and fragility in the face of these escalating threats is the best thing about the film.

The script, by Elisabeth Gooch, is a radical intervention into Le Fanu's gothic-tinged woman-in-peril narrative. At a brisk 89 minutes, *Lies We Tell* cuts out the slow creep of dread, heading straight to the arrival of Uncle Silas (played by David Wilmot) and his retinue, with ambiguity about their motives all but stripped away. This version of Silas shows little charm: the pace demands he display his hand almost immediately. The governess, a glorious villain in the novel (and vamped up by Katina Paxinou in the 1947 Gainsborough Studios adaptation), is reduced to an unsatisfying minor role.

Gooch and Mulcahy clearly want to dispense with Victorian indirection and female passivity. The sexual menace that hovers unstated around Ann Radcliffe's gothic heroines (mentioned in passing with disdain by Maud) is here presented entirely upfront, in a brutal scene of sexual violence quite early on. This explicitness forges Maud as a heroine with a much more active role in her own fate and solves the problem of all those ultra-passive 'women in white' who flit through Victorian sensation novels. But it also loses subtlety and drains the drama of much suspense. The final plot twists deliver a morally complex Maud, closer to her uncle than we might ever have imagined, and if this makes her a decidedly modern post-#MeToo Maud, it comes at considerable cost.

In UK cinemas from 12 October

This solves the problem of all those ultra-passive 'women in white' who flit through Victorian sensation novels

LIES WE TELL

GOLDA

UK/USA 2022
CERTIFICATE 12A 99M 59S

DIRECTOR	GUY NATTIV
WRITTEN BY	NICHOLAS MARTIN
CINEMATOGRAPHY	JASPER WOLF
EDITOR	ARIK LAHAV LEIBOVICH
PRODUCTION DESIGN	ARAD SAWAT
MUSIC	DASCHA DAUENHAUER
COSTUME DESIGN	SINÉAD KIDAO
CAST	HELEN MIRREN CAMILLE COTTIN LIOR ASHKENAZI

SYNOPSIS

October 1973: Israeli prime minister Golda Meir learns that the forces of Egypt, Syria and Jordan are attacking the Sinai peninsula and the Golan Heights. Over the next 19 days she balances military planning, fractious commanders, self-doubt and treatment for cancer as the Yom Kippur War is fought.

REVIEWED BY TIM HAYES

PREMIER LEAGUE Helen Mirren as Golda Meir

The release of *Golda* is timed for the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, a conflict with a coalition of Arab states which the film's opening text attributes to Israel's hubris following previous victories. Hubris is not a characteristic of the politician shown leading the country, though, since this film's Golda Meir is resolute and realistic, keeping self-doubt hidden from her country along with treatment for cancer. Apart from one sequence showing defence minister Moshe Dayan (Rami Heuberger) visiting the front, Meir is in every scene; so the film is defined by Helen Mirren's performance, delivered from behind significant prosthetics and an endless supply of cigarettes – she chain-smokes as if she's sorry she has only the two lungs to work with. Meir's nicotine habit gives the film its visual hook: cigarette butts pile up and flakes of ash gather on the cabinet room table.

These visual asides are *Golda*'s main tactic, partly since resources for anything more sweeping are limited. Guy Nattiv's film was shot primarily in the UK, and its grey skies and damp tarmac do not feel much like Tel Aviv in October. But sometimes the film makes the most of its limitations. When Meir meets a gnomic Henry Kissinger (Liev Schreiber) – then US secretary of state, and about to make satire obsolete by winning the Nobel Peace Prize – the score by Dascha Dauenhauer hints at a tango, with the added sound of typewriter keys, international diplomacy rendered in musical form.

The real Meir appears in archive footage, watched on TV at one point by Mirren-as-Meir. Biopics that do this are actively avoiding realism (whatever that is) to deal in artifice instead, in performance and affect. *Golda* has been knocked for not casting a Jewish person in the title role, a decision Nattiv has defended on the grounds that "from my point of view as a Jewish Israeli director... she had the Jewish chops to play Golda.. I just found her very authentic." People want to feel represented in a political sense, and that's a desire that deserves consideration; but whether or not choosing someone other than Helen Mirren could have made this particular film feel like an authentic representation of Meir is anyone's guess. And like most biopics, *Golda* knows an inauthentic amount about the future. "They will make you prime minister," Meir tells a gung-ho military commander. "But remember all political careers end in failure." She is speaking to future prime minister Ariel Sharon (Ohad Knoller), and nods for emphasis like an oracle sensing exactly who he is.

In UK cinemas now

DAYS OF HAVEN
On the Adamant

ON THE ADAMANT

FRANCE/JAPAN 2022
CERTIFICATE PG 109M 16S

DIRECTOR	NICOLAS PHILIBERT
DIRECTED IN COLLABORATION WITH	LINDA DE ZITTER
CINEMATOGRAPHY	NICOLAS PHILIBERT
EDITOR	NICOLAS PHILIBERT

SYNOPSIS

A documentary exploring the work at L'Adamant Day Centre, a floating mental health service on a barge on the river Seine in Paris, where patients are considered co-authors of their own care. Patients and caregivers are filmed participating in group discussions and art therapy sessions. Recurring characters give interviews direct to camera, sharing their world-views and experience of mental illness.

REVIEWED BY TRAVIS JEPPESEN

One of the intellectual legacies of the student-led revolts in Paris in 1968 has been the pursuit of a fairer, more empathetic approach to both the consideration and the treatment of madness in French society. Spurred by such texts as Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation* (1961) and the pioneering psychoanalytic work of Félix Guattari, thinkers and medical practitioners of a more radical bent have tried to obliterate social conventions that have worked to alienate and stigmatise those deemed mentally unwell – pointing to those very conventions as sources of mental illness – while seeking new ways to cure patients by empowering them.

Nicolas Philibert's documentary *On the Adamant* turns its attention to one of those projects in the present day. The *Adamant* is a barge docked at the foot of the Charles de Gaulle Bridge on Paris's Right Bank which welcomes daily visits by mentally unwell patients residing in the city's first four arrondissements. It operates as a sort of floating refuge, offering a rotating range of services – from a café to visual art workshops to film screenings – all of which are organised in part by the patients themselves, together with a revolving staff that includes psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, educators, specialists and music and art therapists.

The film depicts the inner workings of the Adamant and the people who frequent it – they are mostly left nameless, a decision that in effect blurs the distinction between patient and staff, true to the egalitarian strivings of the place. Rather than relying on a linear narrative or a rigid analysis of the Adamant's functions, Philibert's scenes glide between collective meetings, art therapy workshops and portraits of the patients whose recurring presences form the core of the film. While the afflictions vary from patient to patient, *On the Adamant* has no intention to diagnose, but rather reveals how compelling the patients are as individual personalities. Contrary to stereotypical impressions of the mentally ill as either raving or catatonic, the Adamant's visitors all seem aware of their limitations and challenges, and can discuss them candidly. There's the middle-aged woman who talks with great stoicism about the most painful moment in her life, when her son had to be removed from her care by social workers, and the subsequent work she has put into rebuilding their relationship. There's the bohemian artist with demonstrable talent who only triggers suspicions of unwellness when he suddenly accuses Wim Wenders of having stolen the idea for *Paris, Texas* (1984) from him. In fact, a lot of great art is showcased in the barge's art therapy workshops, confirming what champions of Art Brut have long understood: that the gulf between genius and madness is perhaps not so great.

On the Adamant further destabilises reflexive judgments of insanity with moments of stunning lucidity, as when a patient calmly explains to the camera, "Sure, it happens sometimes that a mad person attacks a police officer. But it is extremely rare. Whenever we hear the news of a terrorist attack, when the media characterises the terrorist as 'mad', we have to laugh. Mad people are not violent. Most of us are, in fact, just extremely fragile people." Occurring about halfway through the film, this powerful line forces the viewer to confront common fears rooted in stereotypes. We don't need to be mad to have sensitivities, certain emotional or psychological wounds, that distinguish us from other individuals and render us vulnerable to external stimuli to which others are immune. From this perspective it is easier to understand, for instance, the young man whose extreme sensitivity to human noise makes it difficult for him to go outside, and to appreciate his self-developed coping mechanism – the adornment of magnets and crystals around his neck which purportedly absorb or deflect the frequencies that disturb him – even if we remain doubtful of the science behind his solution. In these moments, empathy triumphs over scepticism; we are granted a deeper look at recognisably human behaviour of which, in another context, we might have been dismissive.

A more detached perspective might have yielded more insights into the accomplishments and failures of the Adamant as a psychosocial experiment, but the central achievement of *On the Adamant* is its destigmatisation of the individuals portrayed, the path to empathy opened by its annihilation of that distance between 'us' and 'them'.

In UK cinemas from 3 November

OUR RIVER... OUR SKY

FRANCE/UK/KUWAIT/GERMANY/SWITZERLAND/
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES/LEBANON/QATAR 2021
CERTIFICATE 12A 117M 24S

DIRECTOR	MAYSOON PACHACHI
WRITER	MAYSOON PACHACHI
CO-WRITER	IRADA AL-JUBORI
CINEMATOGRAPHY	JONATHAN BLOOM
EDITOR	ALEXANDRE DONOT
PRODUCTION DESIGN	RAYAH AASEE
MUSIC	MARIO SCHNEIDER
COSTUME DESIGN	RAYAH AASEE
CAST	DARINA AL JOUNDI
	ZAINAB AL-GHANIMI
	AMED HASHIMI
	SUZAN MUNEAM

SYNOPSIS

Baghdad, 2006. In a city ravaged by the US invasion of 2003, the parallel stories of ten or so characters interconnect, focusing on Sara, a writer bereft of inspiration. Her creative block mirrors the dead end that the sectarian war has brought to Iraqis. As she leaves her house and encounters routine atrocities alongside everyday life in the city, she begins to see things more clearly.

REVIEWED BY EHSAN KHOSHBAKHT

Our River... Our Sky is about resistance to insanity, the hardest struggle facing individuals caught up in collective, nationwide turmoil. Following a series of documentaries made in the Middle East, for her debut fiction feature (co-written by novelist Irada Al-Jubori) Maysoon Pachachi seeks out situations where humanity has been reduced to acts of survival. In Baghdad three years after the American invasion in 2003, a city rendered bleak and sterile to its inhabitants, characters resort to the defence mechanism of sardonic humour as they fantasise about escaping to a better world.

Sara, a writer and a single mother, played with a graceful despair by the Lebanese actor Darina Al Joundi, holds the centre of the film as storylines branch out to other characters in her neighbourhood and family. No longer able to write, Sara makes her living by filling out migration applications and writing letters of appeal to the US forces on behalf of detainees. Pachachi shows how the female body becomes subject to scrutiny and control, as intolerance towards women grows more pronounced within the sectarian war. Early on, the dead body of an alleged sex worker is recovered from the Tigris with words scribbled on it, warning other women against a similar fate. Thanks to a well-intentioned eagerness to tell more, this potentially key narrative thread gets lost in a cluster of side stories of intolerance between Sunni and Shia, Muslim and Christian, the religious and the secular. There are some finer touches though.

In William Dieterle's notorious and troubling *Another Dawn* (1937), British soldiers are engaged in a war to "build civilisation" in an unnamed Arab country (clearly Iraq). In the midst of battle, Errol Flynn jokingly informs his superiors that he has run out of ammunition, but not Arabs; natives are reduced to fleeting ghosts in dishdashas who speak gibberish nonsense. (In the absence of Arabic speakers in Hollywood, at least one Arab in the film speaks Greek!) Pachachi, reversing that trope, shrewdly avoids showing the perpetrators of violence. Instead of dehumanising the natives, as in classical Hollywood, her work humanises them; no matter who fires the shot, it is the ordinary people caught in the conflict who pay for it.

A co-production between three Western European and three Arab countries (Iraq is not one of them), Pachachi's treatment of a traumatic experience nevertheless carries the ambiguous optimism of an outsider. Like other international co-productions in the Middle East, the film sacrifices the fervent authenticity of a complex situation in favour of global intelligibility, though there is a smart openness about the ending.

The film ends on 30 December 2006, the day of Saddam's execution. We hear the news of his death as the baby of one of the characters is born, its cry heard against the skyline of Baghdad. A new Iraq is born? The film dismisses this notion as the camera lingers long enough to show a storm coming through, changing the steely grey sky to dark yellow, an ominous sign of the hard years ahead and the continuation of bloody atrocities. The baby is not stillborn, but the future might be.

Our River... Our Sky (the original Arabic title roughly translates to 'Everything Is Not') serves as an honourable checklist rather than a map of the Iraqi tragedy. Compared with great Arab films such as the newly revived and highly praised *The Dupes* (*Al-Makhdu'un*, Tewfik Saleh, 1972), which give us a real sense of the scars of the Middle East, this film does not provide deep insight. We have already seen the 'breaking news': the first rockets hitting Baghdad on 19 March 2003, body cameras showing house-to-house searches by US soldiers. I taped these off television as they were happening, hoping that one day, cinema, the art of 'slow news', could counter their narrative. This film, worthy as it is, might be slightly too fast and slapdash for the slow news I would have loved to see from the Iraqi point of view.

In UK cinemas from 20 October

IRAQ AND RUIN
Darina Al Joundi as Sara, Zainab Al-Ghanimi as Reema

RETURN OF THE MACKEM
Kelly Macdonald as Sandra Panza, Monica Dolan as Audrey Amiss

TYPIST ARTIST PIRATE KING

UK 2022
CERTIFICATE 12A 108M 3S

DIRECTOR	CAROL MORLEY
WRITTEN BY	CAROL MORLEY
INSPIRED BY THE LIFE AND TIMES OF	AUDREY AMISS
CINEMATOGRAPHY	AGNÈS GODARD
EDITOR	ALEX MACKIE
PRODUCTION DESIGN	JANEY LEVICK
MUSIC	CARLY PARADIS
COSTUME DESIGN	NATALIE WARD
CAST	MONICA DOLAN KELLY MACDONALD GINA MCKEE

SYNOPSIS

Buddy comedy-cum-road movie loosely based on the life and work of neglected artist Audrey Amiss. When Audrey spots a newspaper call-out for an exhibition, she dupes her mental health careworker Sandra into driving her – and her carrier bags full of art – the 280 miles from London to Sunderland so that she can take part.

REVIEWED BY CATHERINE WHEATLEY

The films of Carol Morley are infused with a relentless curiosity. *The Alcohol Years* (2000), for example, sees Morley sifting through her own history as she attempts to fill in the gaps in her teenage drinking days, while for the 2014 mystery-drama *The Falling*, Morley conducted research into fainting epidemics among teenage girls. Watching them is like sitting with a friend who wants to tell you about the cool thing they've just discovered. Even tempered with sorrow, as in *Dreams of a Life* (2011), her enthusiasm is contagious.

And so it is with *Typist Artist Pirate King* – the result of Morley's time spent digging around in the Wellcome Collection, having been granted a Wellcome Institute Screenwriting Fellowship in 2015. It was here that Morley came across the archival collection of Audrey Amiss, a once-promising young artist whose career was forestalled by mental illness, but who until her death at the age of 79 continued to create and document original works of art, mostly drawn from her daily life. From this vast archival collection Morley has created a collage-like tribute to Amiss, pasting scraps of artworks, diary entries and anecdotes into a fictionalised portrait of the artist as an older woman as she makes her way across England to her native north-east for one final exhibition.

The finished work gives a sense of what it might have been like to spend time in Amiss's company: it is warm, funny, chaotic and a little frustrating. Cantankerous Audrey hoodwinks her frazzled careworker Sandra (Kelly Macdonald) – a woman who has never driven on the motorway – into chauffeuring her the 280 miles to Sunderland in a tiny yellow Nissan Leaf via A-roads and country lanes, setting the stage for a scrappy and occasionally surreal road movie.

As Audrey, Monica Dolan is a riot, careering between childish petulance and regal condescension, delivering snortingly funny one-liners in Amiss's sing-song Mackem accent. "I've left the bathwater in for you… I did a wee in it," she announces grandly to poor old Sandra, whose full name, Sandra Panza, is a nod to Sancho Panza and Amiss's quixotic nature – this is, after all, a woman who gives her occupation in her passport as "TYPIST, ARTIST, PIRATE, KING". Audrey's grip on reality is tenuous to say the least – she mistakes a yogi for a former teacher, and a hitchhiker for an old art-school nemesis. Sandra, meanwhile, is potentially on the verge of her own breakdown, blinking back tears as she tries and mostly fails to wrestle some sense and civility out of her charge. The film veers between Sandra's matter-of-fact perspective and Audrey's flights of fancy, marrying social critique and magic realism, to occasionally jarring effect.

Beautifully lit and shot by cinematographer Agnès Godard, the film is as much a love song to the North of England as to Amiss. Here is Antony Gormley's Angel of the North; here the windswept beaches of Roker and Seaburn. Here are morris dancers and medieval reconstructionists; fields of green and gold; Bury's Guy Garvey singing of angels and drunks and the stars that guide him home. For Audrey these things are no more or less beautiful than the stippled golden curve of a cheesy snack, the vibrant wrapper of a Kit Kat. Lingering shots take in Amiss's paintings and sketches, as well as the scrapbooks of sweet wrappers that constituted her "avant-garde phase".

Like *Dreams of a Life* or *The Alcohol Years*, *Typist Artist Pirate King* is an act of recovery and restoration. Throughout, the film hints at a formative trauma that rent Amiss in two: something to do with her father's death, perhaps, or an art school attack, or an incident at Heber's Ghyll, a beauty spot near Ilkley. But there is no great revelation. Like Joyce Carol Vincent, whose death at home went undiscovered for two years and whose existence became the subject of *Dreams of a Life*, Amiss was a likeable and talented woman who through no fault of her own fell by the wayside. There are brief glimpses of horror here: of a girl confined to a psychiatric ward, unable to speak, of a care system that disappoints both its staff and its patients. For the most part, though, Morley swerves these more sombre considerations, instead giving Audrey the happy ending that life denied her. It's a noble gesture, if a little saccharine. Still, exhibitions of Amiss's work may well follow. Thanks to Morley, Audrey might yet get her second act.

In UK cinemas from 27 October

IF THE STREETS WERE ON FIRE

UK 2022 CERTIFICATE 12A 71M 18S

DIRECTOR	ALICE RUSSELL
CINEMATOGRAPHY	RUBEN WOODIN DECHAMPS
EDITOR	XANNA WARD DIXON
MUSIC	AARON CUPPLES TEMESGEN SAMUEL

SYNOPSIS

With more than 47,000 knife crime incidents already recorded in the UK in 2023, documentary *If the Streets Were on Fire* explores a grassroots movement – BikeStormz – built around getting youths away from violence and out whizzing around on their bicycles. Russell follows BikeStormz's progress and setbacks as the group faces increasing hostility from the authorities.

REVIEWED BY THOMAS HOBBS

From 2010 to 2021, the government has cut services for young people in the United Kingdom by 74 per cent (£1.1bn), with nearly half of London's youth centres disappearing thanks to austerity. In Alice Russell's powerful new documentary, *If the Streets Were on Fire*, the capital is depicted as a hopeless place that has stopped caring about its youth altogether, while the authorities want to confine them within decaying communities defined by gang violence.

The documentary focuses on the enviable drive of Mac Ferrari, a gang member turned social activist. He's the founder of BikeStormz, a grassroots movement – backed by the rapper Stormzy – that takes vulnerable youth away from trouble and gets them riding their BMXs through the safer, more affluent streets of central London. But every time he tries to do good and foster a more productive sense of community, the Metropolitan police swarm in aggressively. Bird's eye-view shots show the police blocking the bikers and pushing them back while office workers look on confused.

As the police do all they can to move the BikeStormz crew out of London altogether, the documentary becomes an exploration of the concept of redemption and whether this is something our politicians actually believe in. "If you don't give someone a second chance, then why should they change?" Mac ponders. The police officer in front of him doesn't offer any kind of answer, as gloomy, ominous electronic music cushions this grimly unproductive exchange of philosophies.

The bicycles seem to represent a return to innocence, forcing young men and women whose eyes have seen way too much to briefly become wondrous, uncorrupted little boys and girls once more. "Doing a wheelie is freedom," one youth says with an infectious, open-eyed wonder. "We are escaping drama and pressure." In the very next scene, police vans show up and the officers threaten to confiscate the bikes altogether.

At a time when one of the most popular shows on Netflix, *Top Boy*, depicts London's inner city as an uncompromisingly bleak place in which it is pretty much impossible to escape the cycles of violence, *If the Streets Were on Fire* feels especially important. It highlights a more righteous path and a solution built on people coming together rather than getting lost in nihilistic tribalism. Perhaps Mac is an idealist, hoping for too much, especially when it comes to starting an open, progressive dialogue with those in charge, who on this showing favour stubbornness and inaction. However, it's crucial his story is shown, especially when there's the possibility it could spark more like him into action.

Throughout the 70-minute runtime, we're shown stories of troubled youths, from Kalvin, a teenager blinded in one eye after a rival gang threw fireworks into his face, to Miles, a young father trying to go straight, but being constantly intimidated by enemies from his past. The tower-block communities they come from are filmed by Russell with an eerie stillness – a statement about Broken Britain. But some of the more Dickensian juxtapositions, where opulent Canary Wharf skyscrapers and grey tower-blocks flash by in quick succession, can sometimes feel far too blunt and heavy-handed.

The film is at its best when it allows you to form your own judgements about whose heart is in the right place, without being force-fed the politics. "These kids come to me for safety," Mac says to Metropolitan Police officers in one meeting that perfectly captures the two opposing sides. "They aren't lurking on estates. When we're on our bikes, we are one family." But he might as well be speaking in tongues, with the apathetic officers looking at him quizzically and insisting the cyclists are exhibiting "behaviour that borders on criminal". It's a poignant scene which, like the hyper-relevant documentary it's a part of, tells important truths about a city where the relationship between the poor and the authorities has never felt so broken.

On BBC iPlayer now

GOOD WHEEL HUNTING
If the Streets Were on Fire

DALÍLAND

UK/USA/FRANCE/HONG KONG 2022
CERTIFICATE 15 97M 1S

DIRECTOR	MARY HARRON
WRITTEN BY	JOHN C. WALSH
CINEMATOGRAPHY	MARCEL ZYSKIND
EDITOR	ALEX MACKIE
PRODUCTION DESIGN	ISONA RIGAU HERAS
MUSIC	EDMUND BUTT
COSTUME DESIGN	HANNAH EDWARDS
CAST	BEN KINGSLEY BARBARA SUKOWA CHRISTOPHER BRINEY RUPERT GRAVES

SYNOPSIS

When a young gallery assistant gets to work with Salvador Dalí, he enters a scene of sex, drugs, and high culture rock 'n' roll. But he soon learns that the great master is beset by emotional and financial melodramas, and discovers just how seedy the art world can be.

REVIEWED BY ANNABEL BAI JACKSON

A BRUSH WITH GENIUS Ben Kingsley as Salvador Dalí

Mary Harron, director of *I Shot Andy Warhol* (1996), *American Psycho* (2000) and *The Notorious Bettie Page* (2005), returns to the grubby subcultures of late 20th-century New York with this portrait of Salvador Dalí in his twilight years, when his ego began to outstrip his relevance. But led by a tame script, which tracks the initiation of a baby-faced and profoundly ordinary young gallery employee into 'Dalí-land', the film manages to turn the story of the *enfant terrible* of surrealism into a run-of-the-mill biographical drama.

In *Dalíland*'s most compelling move, Harron and screenwriter John C. Walsh construct Dalí (Ben Kingsley) as a kind of husk: drained of inspiration, he is now a commercial vessel, paying for extravagant dinners with just a signature – worth more than the cost of the bill – and surrounding himself with a vacuous set of eye-linered, feather boa-ed acolytes. Into this milieu steps James (Christopher Briney), who is seduced by the parties, cocaine, and proximity to genius. He assists Dalí, facilitating his chaotic relationship with his matriarchal, cash-hungry wife Gala (Barbara Sukowa), but remains a conspicuously fictional construct: an audience stand-in, there to make sure Dalí himself is kept at a slippery, smoke-and-mirrors distance.

Kingsley's performance is a sympathetic pastiche, playing Dalí as though he's ribbing an old friend, while Sukowa gets the film's best one-liners. Later, through flashback (Ezra Miller as the young Dalí, moustache and all), we see more of the co-dependent grief that blights their relationship – how Gala is a mother, manager, and outright mystery to Dalí. But the world they initially occupy in 1970s New York seems flimsy: the decadent soirées, with their one-dimensional sense of whimsy, feel like bad fancy-dress parties, while the greed of the commercial art world is presented in a blandly moralising way.

There is also shockingly little here to do with making art. With its emphasis on theatrics, *Dalíland*'s logic seems to rest on a misapprehension. Dalí wasn't interesting because he was an eccentric, but because he was an eccentric who, with his delirious *id*-driven paintings and virtuoso technique, happened to put the rubber stamp on surrealism's mainstream legacy, before sliding into Christian mysticism and pop art. His loss of mastery on canvas – "He does no paintings, nothing!" Gala shrieks when she realises they have no work to sell – is significant. But without this critical interest in the artist, not just the character Dalí once was, there's a sinking feeling that this land could be ruled by any amusing, histrionic socialite.

In UK cinemas from 13 October

Documentaries about North Korea sometimes fall into simply gawking at this Bizarro World

BEYOND UTOPIA

BEYOND UTOPIA

USA/UK 2023

DIRECTOR	MADELEINE GAVIN
CINEMATOGRAPHY	KIM HYUNSEOK
EDITED BY	MADELEINE GAVIN
MUSIC	ADAM TAYLOR TAYLOR PAGE

SYNOPSIS

Documentary using first-hand accounts of North Korean defectors and footage filmed by its subjects to capture the dangerous journey of families attempting to flee the dictatorship, with the assistance of Korean pastor Kim Seungeun. Secretly filmed footage from within North Korea offers a rare glimpse of life in the totalitarian state.

REVIEWED BY NICOLAS RAPOLD

ESCAPED CRUSADER North Korean defector Lee Soyeon

It's one thing to read about North Korea's brutal, isolated dictatorship, quite another to watch the terrifying journeys of those trying to flee its clutches. That's just what Madeleine Gavin's overwhelming documentary *Beyond Utopia* allows us to do, showing one family's nerve-racking flight from North Korea through China and other countries with the help of South Korean pastor Kim Seungeun, a veteran manager of such efforts. The film also fleshes out life and death in North Korea in harrowing detail, with some clandestine glimpses from within the country (captured through hidden bodycams), and chronicles one more escape – by the young son of Lee Soyeon, a defector-turned-activist in South Korea – through Lee's desperate phone calls with fixers.

Documentaries about North Korea sometimes fall into simply gawking at the Bizarro World of life under its propagandistic totalitarian regime. Gavin's use of survivors' giving first-hand accounts and of (some) secret footage of torture and extreme poverty within the country helps stave off this kind of rubbernecking, though some facts of North Korean existence – such as the mandatory submission of household faeces to the government for use as fertiliser – still feel so extreme as to trigger our sense of the absurd. *Beyond Utopia* doesn't shy from the ample suspense in the fugitive family's escape, as they travel at night through jungles and by boat, stopping to rest in safehouses yet always on guard.

The family's journey is a profound profile in courage, with both exhaustion and fortitude written on their faces – father, mother, two young daughters, and an unstoppable 80-year-old grandmother. That strand of the film bears comparison to recent documentaries about Syrian refugees, where the risks feel inscribed in the camerawork. (Part of our access appears to come from self-chronicling by the family or the pastor.) The activist coping with her son's escape from afar is a source of anguish, and hearing only the voices of fixers, who may or may not be on the level, underlines her horror and helplessness. Beatings, execution and threats to the rest of a defector's family are the stakes at virtually every turn.

These are hard but necessary stories to hear, and you get the sense that Gavin wanted to include as much as possible. The editorial scheme can feel almost assaultive, allowing little to no breathing room or flow as it cuts among the journeys, talking-head interviews, glimpses of North Korea, and so on. But it all ends with some incredible reflections by the members of the family, now free in South Korea, about the unreality of their decidedly dystopian former home.

In UK cinemas from 27 October

ACCUSED

UK/USA 2022

DIRECTOR	PHILIP BARANTINI
WRITTEN BY	BARNABY BOULTON JAMES CUMMINGS
CINEMATOGRAPHY	MATTHEW LEWIS
EDITOR	ALEX FOUNTAIN
PRODUCTION DESIGN	AIMEE MEEK
MUSIC	AARON MAY DAVID RIDLEY
COSTUME DESIGN	LEX WOOD
CAST	CHANEIL KULAR ROBBIE O'NEILL JAY JOHNSON

SYNOPSIS

After a bomb explosion kills several people in a central London train station, Harri, a Punjabi British twentysomething, is wrongly accused of the crime by a social media mob. When vigilantes break into his family home in the countryside to exact revenge, a cat-and-mouse game ensues.

REVIEWED BY ARJUN SAJIP

IDENTITY CRISIS Chaneil Kular as Harri

If you want to build a marketable reputation as a risk-taking filmmaker, you could do worse than shoot a one-take movie. In British director Philip Barantini's second feature, the taut kitchen drama *Boiling Point* (2021), the camera winds through a fancy London restaurant as its head chef stews in a pressure cooker of mounting emotional, financial and logistical turmoil. But where that film kept numerous narrative plates spinning in defiance of single-take constraints, the storytelling in Barantini's follow-up, *Accused*, is relentlessly single-minded, even as it blends two well-worn subgenres: the wrong-man nail-biter and the home-invasion thriller.

Inverting its predecessor's ticking time-bomb structure, *Accused* begins in earnest with an offscreen bomb explosion in a London train station. Harri (Chaneil Kular), a young Punjabi Brit en route to his wealthy parents' country pile to dogsit while his mum and dad are on holiday, is as shocked as all the other passengers reading the news on their phones. But after he arrives home, shock turns to terror: police release an indistinct photo of their suspect, who bears some resemblance to Harri, and a former schoolfriend identifies it as Harri on social media. The online hive-mind quickly pieces together Harri's whereabouts, and racist vigilantes soon arrive at his family mansion to wreak vengeance.

Accused sets the stakes with grim efficiency, and Kular is entirely credible as an increasingly frantic everyman. But amid the clockwork plotting, there's no room for ambiguity or nuance: Harri is a doomed victim of racism and circumstance, his masked assailants nativist malevolence made flesh. Straight-ahead suspensers are no bad thing, but Barantini is more preoccupied with crafting a cautionary (and explicitly post-Brexit) tale about the dangers of social media than with fine-tuning the film's thriller elements. At several points, mostly when an internet pile-on is growing increasingly febrile, the camera switches to follow the typing hands of online trolls around the country. These breaks in continuity leach intensity by jerking us from our protagonist's perspective, and, worse, they come off as didactic.

And so the usual pitfalls and clichés of home-invasion movies creep in: questionable fugitive tactics, unlikely escapes, the early demise of the faithful family hound. Soon enough, it feels a foregone conclusion that our young naïf will be forced into actions that strip him of his innocence. By the end, as with *Boiling Point*, you're left with the impression that watching dominoes being precariously set up can be more rewarding than watching them topple.

On Netflix now

It feels a foregone conclusion that our young naïf will be forced into actions that strip him of his innocence

ACCUSED

20,000 SPECIES OF BEES

SPAIN 2023
CERTIFICATE 12A 128M 11S

DIRECTOR	ESTIBALIZ URRESOLA SOLAGUREN
WRITTEN BY	ESTIBALIZ URRESOLA SOLAGUREN
CINEMATOGRAPHY	GINA FERRER GARCÍA
EDITOR	RAÚL BARRERAS
PRODUCTION DESIGN	IZASKUN URKIJO ALIJO
COSTUME DESIGN	NEREA TORRIJOS
CAST	SOFÍA OTERO PATRICIA LOPEZ ARNAIZ ANE GABARAIN

SYNOPSIS

Sculptor Ane and her three children visit her family home in the Basque country for a summer vacation among the beehives. Aitor, an eight-year-old child born biologically male, questions her gender identity, while her mother throws into doubt her creative identity.

REVIEWED BY SOPHIA SATCHELL-BAEZA

BUZZ CONDUCTOR Sofia Otero as Aitor/Lucía

The image of the beehive must be one of the hardest-working metaphors in Spanish culture. In Camilo José Cela's modernist novel *The Hive* (1950), it stands for the teeming, wounded city of Madrid in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War. In Víctor Eríce's cinematic masterpiece *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973), with which this Basque fiction-feature debut has been unfairly compared, the beehive represents order, obedience and middle-class insularity under Franco. But here, bees buzz around to a wildly different meaning, representing the sheer diversity – and via their wax, the malleability – of identity. Bees stand for freedom. They are a medicine.

It's among the family beehives on a summer vacation in the Basque countryside that an eight-year-old child begins to question their gender identity, just as her mother (a sculptor who works with beeswax) struggles with her creative one. Born biologically male as Aitor (Sofía Otero) but called the more gender neutral Cocó, she wants to be called Lucía. Lucía flees to the hive to escape the misunderstanding that surrounds her, finding solace in the company of her open-minded beekeeper great aunt. In a stellar choice of gender-blind casting, the film conspicuously places a young cisgender girl in the role of trans girl Lucía, helping keep the central character's gender identity at first ambiguous, and certainly fluid. Otero rightly won the Silver Bear at Berlinale for her performance in what is not an easy role; Lucía struggles to put words to what she's going through and communicates much of the time through her eyes. The Spanish language being grammatically gendered, genders switch subtly and lightning-fast, much as the film flits across linguistic and geographic borders. The naming of people, of things, becomes an important thread in the film, which never actually attaches a label to Lucía's struggles. "I don't want to be called anything," she pleads.

Given the character's dislike of labelling, it seems fitting that Basque director Estibaliz Urresola Solaguren has not created a hot-button social-issues drama, choosing instead to widen her lens on a large family, not unlike her Berlinale Golden Bear-winning predecessor Carla Simón's rural drama *Alcarrás* (2022). Solaguren's film can also be compared to a recent slate of European trans coming-of-agers like Emanuele Crialese's *L'immensità* (2022), Lukas Dhont's *Girl* (2018) and Sébastien Lifshitz's documentary *Little Girl* (2020). *20,000 Species of Bees* is marked by two strong, lived-in performances and an effortlessly naturalistic feel. It's just a shame that overladen beeswax metaphors have to come in and spoil the pudding. Give the bees a break: they've been through enough.

In UK cinemas from 27 October

HOW TO HAVE SEX

UK/GREECE/BELGIUM/FRANCE 2023

DIRECTOR	MOLLY MANNING WALKER
WRITTEN BY	MOLLY MANNING WALKER
CINEMATOGRAPHY	NICOLAS CANNICCIONI
EDITOR	FIN OATES
PRODUCTION DESIGN	LUKE MORAN-MORRIS
MUSIC	JAMES JACOB
COSTUME DESIGN	GEORGE BUXTON
CAST	MIA MCKENNA-BRUCE LARA PEAKE SAMUEL BOTTOMLEY SHAUN THOMAS

SYNOPSIS

Teenagers Tara, Anna and Skye take their first girls' holiday abroad to Malia in Crete to party. After a series of near-misses and almost-romantic encounters, Tara unsatisfyingly loses her virginity to Paddy, a fellow partygoer, an encounter that later leads to a traumatic experience for Tara.

REVIEWED BY CHRISTINA NEWLAND

In Molly Manning Walker's debut feature *How to Have Sex*, we hear the holidaymakers before we see them: as the title credits scroll, the discount airline intercom announces its arrival in Crete, and a plane full of revellers in their teens and early twenties explodes with raucous energy. Among the revellers are three girls on their first trip abroad: Anna (Anna Antoniades), loyal and academically gifted, Skye (Lara Peake), a pass-agg alpha female, and Tara (Mia McKenna-Bruce), the group's fun-loving but shy virgin. The trio squeal with girlish brio as they strap into their bikinis and down as many WKDs as their stomachs will allow (tactical vomiting notwithstanding).

The film expertly captures the whirl of frantic activity and sensation of a discount holiday: a soundscape of pumping, dissociative bass, splashing vomit, and alcopop bottles clinking in the sun. Manning Walker draws on her own experiences of the boozy holiday abroad – practically a rite of passage for young Brits, and often a minefield of sexual dynamics, something protagonist Tara has yet to learn to navigate. *How to Have Sex* is both testament to the thrill and ardour of youthful hedonism and to the turning point when the party isn't fun any more: that moment when your feet hurt, your false eyelash is coming off and you want to go home. Maybe it was never fun; maybe it only was when a particular boy was paying attention to you; maybe you were pretending all along.

The three girls bond with their hotel neighbours – two Northern lads, Paddy (Samuel Bottomley) and Badger (Shaun Thomas, goofy and surprisingly tender), plus a girl who Anna soon has her eye on. But it is subtly highlighted that the young people's elaborate and discomfiting mating rituals are recipes for disappointment: hopeful of losing her virginity and goaded by her pals, Tara sets out on the challenge eagerly and is rewarded with an uncomfortable, chilly shag on the beach.

SUMMER NIGHTS
Mia McKenna-Bruce as Tara

The dynamic between Manning Walker's characters and their shifting loyalties and betrayals – in casual nightclub abandonments or drunken remarks – is excruciatingly realistic, particularly the catty backhandedness of the jealous Skye. Her magnanimity toward Tara dwindles drastically based on how much attention each of them is getting; in turn, Tara grows increasingly withdrawn and dubious around her overcompensating friend.

There's a real thrum of dread which hangs over the naive and pretty Tara – one night in particular, when she is separated from the flock and emerges, in the empty morning, *28 Days Later*-style, in a fluorescent green minidress among the wreckage of the deserted high street. Manning Walker films her at a distance with a slow reversing dolly, amping up the borderline comic-horror element. Dousing her characters in vodka, sweat, and neon light, you can see Manning Walker's background as a director of photography come to the fore: this is incredibly evocative and detail-oriented work.

All of this to say, the ominous and sadly ever-present threat posed by the men around Tara is clear without what happens next. The girl's rush to lose her virginity and the resulting disappointment is compelling enough; the nauseating possibility of sexual violence less so. There's much to be said for the accuracy in Manning Walker's portrayal of the moments this possibility enters the scene: the way consent shifts and is twisted by abusers, the way otherwise decent people (the gentle Badger, in particular) hang on to their allegiances with the abusers.

But *How to Have Sex* is a more nuanced film when it is exploring those dynamics subtly, rather than twisting the knife and inflicting rape on its protagonist. That the individual trauma Tara suffers in the film is very real, and very possible, is not in doubt: it is performed and treated with an anguish that is difficult to watch. But the fact that no one in the film once seems to enjoy a thing about sex – except, maybe, sometimes gossiping about it – is dispiriting. There's a pessimism – even conservatism – to the film's ideas about sex and female sexuality. This story may have the ring of truth when it comes to rape culture, but in presenting the threat of rape as a defining fact of sex, it does feel rather unrealistically bleak. The film's sense that all heterosexual relations are doomed to fall into patterns of abuse and self-recrimination could play into the hands of anti-sex puritans: it reads a bit like a cautionary tale about the perils of trying too hard to lose your virginity, or competing for male attention, or all the things straight teenage girls do. It is a profoundly touching and well-made film about the specifics of teen experience: and yet it touches little outside its own pre-ordained ideas about how miserable it is to be a girl.

In UK cinemas from 3 November

CROOKS' TOUR
Tony Leung as Nam Kong

WHERE THE WIND BLOWS

CHINA/HONG KONG/TAIWAN/UK 2021
CERTIFICATE 15 143M 37S

DIRECTOR	PHILIP YUNG
WRITTEN BY	PHILIP YUNG
SCREENPLAY	EFFY SUN
CO-SCREENPLAY	OLIVER YIP LAM WAI TUNG
CINEMATOGRAPHY	CHIN TING CHANG
EDITED BY	J. HIM LEE ZHANG ZHAO
PRODUCTION DESIGN	BILL LUI
MUSIC	DING KE
COSTUME DESIGN	PETRA KWOK
CAST	AARON KWOK TONY LEUNG DU JUAN MICHAEL HUI JESSIE LI

SYNOPSIS

Detectives Lui Lok and Nam Kong become powerful figures in postwar Hong Kong, taking joint control of the country's crime syndicates. When Nam attempts to seize power for himself, Lui vows revenge, but both men are threatened when a new anti-corruption force is given the authority to arrest dirty cops.

REVIEWED BY PHILIP CONCANNON

Where the Wind Blows has not had a straightforward path to the big screen. Originally set for release towards the end of 2018 under the title *Theory of Ambitions*, Philip Yung's follow-up to his acclaimed thriller *Port of Call* (2015) failed to win approval from China's National Radio and Television Administration. After years of appeals and re-edits, the film's premiere was rescheduled for the 2021 Hong Kong International Film Festival, but it was abruptly pulled three days before the screening. 'Technical reasons' were cited, although as *Variety* noted in their report on the incident, 'technical reasons' is widely understood in mainland China as a euphemism for censorship.

Trouble with the state censor is probably to be anticipated when a film is addressing institutional corruption, although Yung may have assumed he was on safer ground by only depicting events that occurred when Hong Kong was under British rule. *Where the Wind Blows* tells the story of the 'Four Great Sergeants', the notoriously corrupt police officers who controlled organised crime in Hong Kong during the 1960s and 70s. Of the four men, Yung focuses on Lui Lok (Aaron Kwok) and Nam Kong (Tony Leung), whose very different paths to power are depicted in parallel narrative threads before they become partners in crime and ultimately rivals.

Well, that's one story, anyway. In looking at the entire scope of these lives, it feels like Yung has tried to include almost everything that happened to them. The film spans decades, and Yung's relentless pace makes it hard to keep track of where exactly we are in time, or which characters are important. With enough material for half-a-dozen feature films here, some potentially fascinating incidents are skimmed over far too quickly. For instance, it is astonishing that the arrest of corrupt policemen in 1977 by the Independent Commission Against Corruption led to violent public clashes between police and ICAC; this kind of material would have had *Prince of the City*-era Sidney Lumet rubbing his hands in glee, but Yung is done with it in a few minutes.

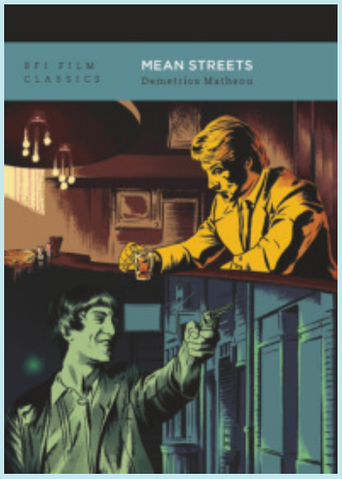
The whole film feels like that; a series of truncated episodes giving us tantalising glimpses of stories that never quite take shape. Narrative momentum is lost when we're constantly having to find our bearings, or when Yung keeps stalling for black-and-white flashbacks which illuminate his characters' formative wartime experiences. Of the two protagonists, Lui Lok gets more of a character arc, beginning as an idealistic young cadet who refuses every bribe (shades of Frank Serpico, as his integrity makes him an outcast) before hardening into a power-hungry cynic; but the traumatic backstory adds little value, and his flashbacks are too perfunctory to carry resonance. Despite an emotional monologue recalling his tragic past, Nam Kong feels underwritten, and Yung relies heavily on Leung's smouldering charisma to sell this coolly reserved character, with his romantic pining rather self-consciously recalling *In the Mood for Love* (2000).

There's no doubt that Philip Yung has style, ambition and daring to burn, and *Where the Wind Blows* has plenty of purely aesthetic pleasures. The lavish, detailed recreation of Hong Kong throughout various eras is impressive, and cinematographer Chin Ting-chang shoots it elegantly, often enhancing dramatic lighting with copious cigarette smoke. Yung is always looking for unexpected compositions and angles, and he pulls off a number of big set pieces with panache: Nam Kong singlehandedly takes down a gang of thugs in a smoke-filled warehouse; Lui Lok's courtship of his wife is presented as an MGM-style dance number; an elaborate shootout in the rain is incongruously set to composer Ding Ke's cover of Karen Dalton's 'Something on Your Mind'.

It's just a shame we don't have more time to settle in and enjoy these flashes of inspiration. The frantic editing is always cutting away too quickly, sowing disorientation and frustration. How much of this is down to Yung trying to cram a whole television series' worth of incident in one feature, and how much to the demands of the Chinese censor? It's impossible to say for sure, but having six named editors in the credits suggests a post-production process from which few films could emerge in a coherent shape.

In UK cinemas now

READ



MEAN STREETS

BFI FILM CLASSICS

By Demetrios Matheou, British Film Institute, 112pp, Paperback, £12.99, 60 colour images, 9781839022951

Mean Streets (1973) was Martin Scorsese's third feature film, and the one that confirmed him as a major new talent. Demetrios Matheou's insightful study considers its production history in the context of the New Hollywood period of American cinema. He analyses the importance of Scorsese's background to the film's characters and themes; the development of the director's film-making process and signature style; the way in which he both drew upon and invigorated the crime genre; his relationship with emerging stars Robert De Niro and Harvey Keitel, and the film's reception and legacy. Matheou argues that while *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull* are regarded as Scorsese's greatest films of the period, *Mean Streets* is the more influential achievement.

www.bloomsbury.com/BFIFilmClassics

RUSHMORE

BFI FILM CLASSICS

By Kristi Irene McKim, British Film Institute, 120pp, Paperback, £12.99, 60 colour images, 9781839024498

Earning critical acclaim and commercial success upon its 1998 release, *Rushmore*—the sophomore film of American auteur Wes Anderson—quickly gained the status of a cult classic. Kristi McKim's compelling study of the film argues that despite the film's titular call for haste and excess (rush/more), it challenges a drive toward perfectionism and celebrates the quiet connections that defy such passion and speed. After establishing Rushmore's history and reception, McKim closely reads Rushmore's energetic musical montages relative to slower moments that introduce tenderness and ambiguity, in a form subtler than Max's desire-built drive or genre-based plays. Drawing out Rushmore's subtleties that soften, temper, ease, expand, and equalise the film's zeal, she reads the film with a generosity learned from the film itself.

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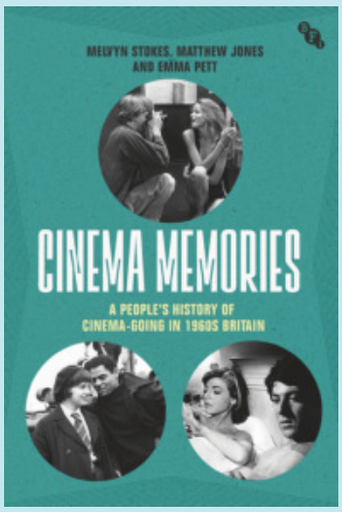

CINEMA MEMORIES

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF CINEMA-GOING IN 1960S BRITAIN

By Melvyn Stokes, Matthew Jones and Emma Pett, British Film Institute, 256pp, Paperback, £27.99, 9781839025297

Cinema Memories brings together and analyses the memories of almost a thousand people of going to the cinema in Britain during the 1960s. It offers a fresh perspective on the social, cultural and film history of what has come to be seen as an iconic decade, with the release of films such as *A Taste of Honey*, *The Sound of Music*, *Darling*, *Blow-Up*, *Alfie*, *The Graduate*, and *Bonnie and Clyde*.

Drawing on first-hand accounts the authors explore how cinema-goers constructed meanings from the films they watched - through a complex process of negotiation between the films concerned, their own social and cultural identities, and their awareness of changes in British society. Their analysis sheds light on how the Sixties in Britain is remembered and interpreted.

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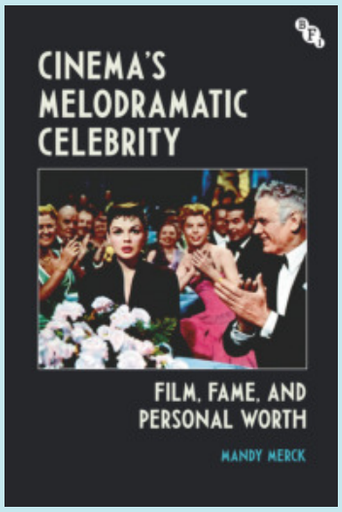

CINEMA'S MELODRAMATIC CELEBRITY

FILM, FAME, AND PERSONAL WORTH

By Mandy Merck, British Film Institute, 280pp, Paperback, £27.99, 30 B&W images, 9781839024573

Are today's celebrities worth our attention? In that demand for judgement and the hope for its visual guidance, the melodramatic imagination survives – permeating not only fiction film, but documentary, the artist's film, and our self-exhibition on social media.

Challenging the study of both celebrity and the cinema, Mandy Merck argues that modern fame and film melodrama are part of the same worldview, one that cannot resolve the relation of personal worth to social esteem. Examining a range of classical and contemporary films from Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* to Laura Poitras's *Citizenfour*, the many remakes of *A Star Is Born*, the compulsory exhibitionism of political celebrity and the unmasking of whistle-blowers, Merck illustrates the ways in which the cinema constantly restages the moral evaluation of prominent individuals, whether they are actors, artists, politicians or activists.

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ADVERTISING FEATURE

Two dramas by Kira Muratova

Though the director's work has found new, appreciative audiences in the West since the fall of the Soviet Union, her films remain hard to see. Now, two restorations show off her complex, intimate portrayals of 'the nervous tension of life'

BY HANNAH MCGILL

Kira Muratova was born in 1934, in a part of Romania that would subsequently become Moldova. Her Communist parents were displaced to the USSR during World War II, and her father eventually executed by the Nazis. The remaining family returned to Romania, where Muratova's mother became a Party functionary, part of whose responsibility was to view foreign films for state approval. Here was rooted Muratova's interest in film, and perhaps a duality in her own work: exposure to a range of international cinema helped engender an aesthetic openness and intellectual curiosity often at odds with the ideological expectations attached to state-approved production.

Muratova was drawn to poetic forms of expression, which conflicted with the ideals of socialist realism; and to examining the real lot of Russian women, whose advertised position was as equal partners in revolution, but who still seemed to get landed with most of the chores. She was interested, in short, in the frailties and conflicts of the individual consciousness, particularly as it tries to adapt itself – to the needs of another individual or to the demands of a society. As Isabel Jacobs puts it in one of the interviews accompanying these new 4K restorations of Muratova's first two films, she portrayed the "nervous tension of life". Her imperfect alignment with the demands of state propaganda is further expressed by her physical distance from its epicentre: after completing her studies at the VGIK film school in Moscow, she relocated to Odessa Film, and remained in the Ukrainian port city until her death in 2018 at the age of 83.

Muratova was prolific – she made more than 20 feature films of her own, as well as collaborating on two with her first husband, Aleksandr Muratov – but as Elena Gorfinkel adds in the extras, she was also one of the most censored filmmakers of the Soviet era. Her work was reclaimed and much celebrated after perestroika, and winning a Silver Bear at the Berlinale for *The Asthenic Syndrome* in 1990 kicked off a late period of great productivity. Still, her oeuvre has not been widely available to view, and among non-experts remains relatively obscure compared to that of other Russian and Eastern European filmmakers of the same time.

These two restorations help to correct this and, with the films' mix of tender poetic enquiry and spiky visual experimentation, whet the appetite for more Muratova. They capture, in their content as well as in the suppression they both endured, the ambivalent relationship Muratova would continue to have with Soviet authority. She believed in the socialist project for which her parents had both toiled and her father had died, yet she was no advocate of surveillance or censorship. And while these films

PARTY PEOPLE
Zinaida Sharko as Yevgeniya, Oleg Vladimirsky as Sasha in *The Long Farewell* (1971, below); Nina Ruslanova as Nadia in *Brief Encounters* (1967, opposite)

Muratova was drawn to poetic forms of expression, which conflicted with the ideals of socialist realism; and to examining the real lot of Russian women, whose advertised position was as equal partners in revolution, but who still seemed to get landed with most of the chores

represent only some aspects of a vastly flexible talent, evident through a stylistically diverse body of work, they display amply the adventurousness of Muratova's visual imagination, the vibrancy of her storytelling and the sensitivity of her work with actors.

In *Brief Encounters* (1967), Muratova is herself one of the actors. She plays Valentina, a state official whose dull, strictly managed working life contrasts with her intense, insecure romantic bond with wandering geologist and poet Maksim (Vladimir Vysotsky). Though she took on the role *in extremis*, after things didn't work out with her intended actress, Muratova is compelling, bringing both charm and melancholy to Valentina's various confrontations with masculine authority and human uncertainty. With Maksim – an attractive but egotistical troubadour, closely modelled on Vysotsky's real-life persona as a famed singer-songwriter – Valentina endures a besotted, frustrated back-and-forth. She wants them to be together, but he doesn't want to live in the city, doesn't want to be tied down, doesn't want any labels or compromises. As countless other women have at times of social change, Valentina finds herself questioning whether her own part in the revolution – working for the state as an equal to men, yet still subject to their domestic and emotional unavailability – isn't the worst of both worlds. And then comes Nadia (star-to-be of Soviet cinema Nina Ruslanova, in her first film role). A former lover of Maksim's, she comes to claim him – but instead, falls into a friendship with Valentina, in the course of which each privately ponders and reassesses her memories of Maksim.

The film is distinguished by the intimacy of its dialogue scenes, and the striking visual compositions that Muratova and cinematographer Gennady Karyuk conjure through unexpected angles and juxtapositions. Yet the film does not feel self-conscious or weighty. Bearing the clear influence of the French New Wave, it is melancholy, but playful, charged – like Maksim's gruff folk songs – with both romance and cynicism.

Rejection of the traditional Soviet female role – a hybrid of diligent worker bee and selfless earth mother – intensifies in *The Long Farewell* (1971). In a performance so skilled, so seemingly attuned to what the camera sees that it's difficult to believe she had never acted on screen before, Zinaida Sharko plays middle-aged mother and hardworking Party functionary Yevgeniya. Her son Sasha, whom she somewhat smothers, is played with matching intensity by Oleg Vladimirsky. Sasha embarks on early romantic adventures, Yevgeniya attempts late-life ones; and as she pursues the same social credibility and respectability that his budding teenage rebelliousness rejects, the freewheeling, fractious energy between them is at once primally intense and very funny. As both Gorfinkel and Jacobs note in their analyses of the film, Muratova was as interested in language as in image. With its long, improvised, sometimes quite inconsequential conversations, this film gives free rein to her love of repetition, slang, puns and regional variation in pronunciation.

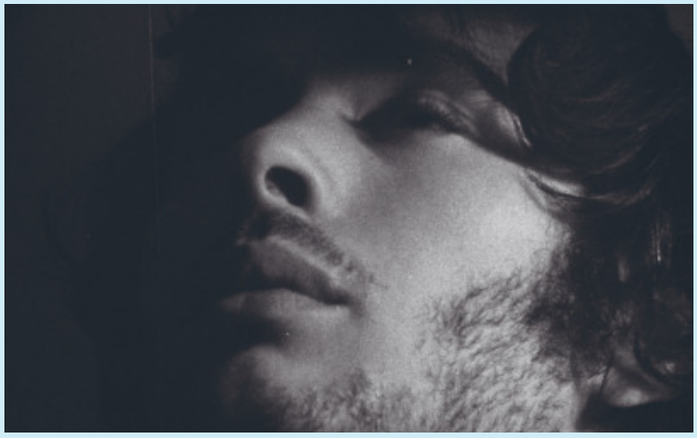
Restorations look and sound pristine. Extras are basic but extremely useful for scholars and the merely curious alike. In the accompanying interviews, Gorfinkel and Jacobs display tremendous knowledge about Muratova, her context and the films themselves, without repeating the same information. *Brief Encounters* is also accompanied by a video essay by Masha Shpolberg exploring the film's unique visual flourishes.

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Kira Muratova; USSR 1967; Studiocanal; Region B Blu-ray; b&w; in Russian, with English subtitles; Certificate PG; 95 minutes; 1:37:1. Extras: interviews about the film with academics Elena Gorfinkel and Isabel Jacobs; video essay by Masha Shpolberg.

THE LONG FAREWELL

Kira Muratova; USSR 1971; Studiocanal; Region B Blu-ray; b&w; in Russian, with English subtitles; Certificate PG; 100 minutes; 1:37:1. Extras: interviews about the film with academics Elena Gorfinkel and Isabel Jacobs.



WHEEL OF ASHES

Peter Emanuel Goldman; US/France 1968; Re:Voir; region-free DVD; b&w; in French/English, with English subtitles; 119 minutes; 1.33. Extras: 8mm reels from 1965; booklet.

REVIEWED BY SOPHIA SATCHELL-BAEZA

Wheel of Ashes feels like a film that was made after, not before, the convulsions of May 1968. Ahead of that moment when the streets of Paris would light up with the flares of revolution, American underground filmmaker Peter Emanuel Goldman made a film about a young man's spiritual quest: an internalised *dérive* through Saint-Germain in which the mood is distinctly sombre, the questions painfully inward-looking. The film seems to want to ask: where did it all go wrong?

Clearly shot on a threadbare budget, *Wheel of Ashes* was to be Goldman's last completed narrative feature. Picking up where his earlier underground classic *Echoes of Silence* (1965) left off, it swaps the gritty streets of Greenwich Village for the equally squalid sheen of the Left Bank while maintaining the same spirit of beatnik aimlessness and self-doubt. In his 1975 book *Film Is...*, fellow American in Europe Stephen Dwoskin would refer to *Echoes of Silence* as plumbing the "strange void in people's lives", seeing it as a film that reflects the modern condition of alienation. Curiously, Dwoskin doesn't mention *Wheel of Ashe*s, a film that seems to plumb this and then some. It seems to be a common problem: the film has been rarely screened and really should be better known, not least for how it links the New York underground with the French New Wave, and beatnik existentialism with new age spirituality.

Goldman lets Pierre Clémenti, his monk-like cipher, be buffeted by emotional tempests: these are tempests, however, that mostly rage internally. From bedroom to beatnik bar, Pierre must battle the pleasures of the flesh in his quest for enlightenment. In true 60s style, temptation is portrayed largely through the camera's too-close tracking of women's miniskirts and suspenders, illustrating the protagonist's rampant desires while presumably indulging its audiences' repressed ones. Given the pre-revolutionary context in which it was shot – the film was partly funded with a grant awarded by Jean-Luc Godard, and stars Judith Malina, co-founder of the New York-based political theatre group The Living Theatre, as well as Juliet Berto, among others – *Wheel of Ashes* is curiously inward looking, more hippie self-transcendence than Marxist organising.

In a booklet essay accompanying this release, Emeric de Lastens sees *Wheel of Ashes* as being in a similarly romantic register to the films of the radical Zanzibar Group – particularly those of Philippe Garrel, with whom Goldman shared Clémenti as actor and muse. The protagonist's search is spiritual, but his vertiginous descent into madness more closely resembles free-falling drug addiction: a parable, perhaps, of the dangers of finding transcendence in artificial paradises. The film falls apart, as all things are wont to do, and the prevailing mood is one of loss and despair. Did I say it's exquisite?

DISC: Beautifully remastered from original 16mm elements by MoMA in New York, the film looks incredible. A collection of 16mm reels and a booklet essay by Emeric de Lastens are welcome bonuses.

GREGORY'S GIRL

Bill Forsyth; UK 1980; BFI; 4K Ultra HD/Region B Blu-ray; English SDH; Certificate 12; 92 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: commentary by Bill Forsyth and Mark Kermode; commentary by actors Robert Buchanan, Douglas Sannachan and Caroline Guthrie; *The Strathclyde Tapes* (2014) – Forsyth talking to schoolchildren; cast interviews; soundtrack gallery; alternative US audio; original trailer; booklet.

REVIEWED BY PAUL SALT

Bill Forsyth was so successful in capturing Scottish life that for its American release *Gregory's Girl* needed redubbing with 'milder' accents. The film's humour stems from specific observation of the lives of schoolboys earnestly interacting with a world they do not yet understand, experiencing desires that they don't know how to fulfil, at least not healthily.

The opening sequence has Gregory and his friends staring at an unknowing nurse as she undresses. Later, the boys trade pictures of a classmate, Dorothy, without her knowledge; Gregory's ten-year-old sister is viewed as a sexual prospect in the making by an older boy. It all feels more sinister now, but Forsyth keeps us firmly invested in their naive perspective.

The boys see sex as a trophy to be won, but it's the girls who have the power. Largely withstanding or ignoring the attention of men and boys (and wondering if there is a difference between the two), they quietly make their own plans for Gregory, who is led helplessly to his destiny. Meanwhile, Dorothy focuses on her footballing skills and ignores barriers with a cheerful smile and natural competence. The girls have grown up, and all the boys can do is chase fantasies, such as their fabled land of plenty, Caracas.

Unpolished performances by John Gordon Sinclair, Dee Hepburn and Clare Grogan are perfect vehicles for the film's naturalism and youthful energy. Forsyth and cinematographer Michael Coulter shoot in vibrant, summery colours. Combined with Colin Tully's sax-heavy score, it evokes a Britain seldom seen on the big screen any more. *Gregory's Girl* remains a beautiful testament to innocence on the cusp of experience.

DISC: A crisp 4K restoration from original camera negative returns Forsyth's film to vivid life with immaculate sound and picture quality. Cast and director interviews are illuminating and humorous, a new audio commentary by three cast members offers interesting insights, and the booklet has thoughtful essays on the film's impact.

NIGHT OF THE HUNTED

Jean Rollin; France 1980; Indicator; region-free 4K Ultra HD or Blu-ray; in French, with English subtitles; Certificate 18; 92 minutes; 1.66:1. Extras: commentary by Tim Lucas; partial commentaries by Rollin and actor Brigitte Lahaie; cast and crew interviews; appreciation by Stephen Thrower; alternative scenes from sex film version *Filles traquées*; trailer; stills and artwork gallery; booklet.

REVIEWED BY KIM NEWMAN

On a lonely road at night a motorist (Vincent Gardére) is flagged down by a mystery woman (Brigitte Lahaie) in a nightgown. The young man gives the apparent amnesiac a lift – and sinister operatives pursue. This apparent remake of the opening of Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) leads to an unusually chilly, apocalyptic science-fiction film from *fantastique* auteur Jean Rollin. It evokes early David Cronenberg but also draws on the alienating modern Paris of *Alphaville* (1965) and glances forward to the memory-wiping of Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000).

Elisabeth – if that is her name – is recaptured by a cadre of medical men and government-sanctioned killers and taken to an imposing tower block repurposed as a holding facility for victims of a radiation leak who have lost the ability to retain memories. Lost souls struggle to perform even pre-programmed actions like spooning soup or unbuttoning clothes, and lament the absence of a personal past, which they replace with of-the-moment sensations (ie, sex – especially in the producer-sanctioned version) and imagined histories. The young man makes a fuss, and the cover-up cracks even as the patients enter the terminal phase, to be hustled off to a railway siding for clumsy euthanasia. In a perfect match of story and location, the film ends on a spectacular viaduct across the city as two zombies – more like plants than animals, we're told – stumble hand-in-hand to oblivion.

Rollin made this after a spell working in hardcore porn – and he cast performers from that industry, who are generally excellent as not-all-there radiation victims – but also some time after his counterculture-informed vampire vogue had passed. This film has harder edges, literally in the bleak architecture, and in the politicised vision of an oppressive state, which harks back to France's Nazi occupation but also relates to many end-of-the-1970s contemporary events.

DISC: The 4K transfer reveals this atypical effort as one of Rollin's most visually arresting works. A wealth of extra materials provides useful context – even if watching 17 minutes of added sex scenes is not to all tastes – for the film and establishes its unique place in the director's filmography.

Gothic

Concealed beneath the wild, trashy surface of Ken Russell's account of the Swiss holiday that engendered Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a poignant portrait of haunted creativity

Ken Russell; UK/US 1986; BFI; Region B Blu-ray; English SDH; Certificate 18; 88 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: audio commentary by film historian Matthew Melia and the director's widow Lisi Russell; interviews with writer Stephen Volk and actor Julian Sands; audio-only *Guardian* Lecture Series conversation between Russell and Derek Malcolm; Russell films *Amelia and the Angel* (1958) and *The Fall of the Louse of Usher* (2002); trailer; booklet.

BY ALEX RAMON

Reviewing Ken Russell's return to D.H. Lawrence adaptation with 1989's *The Rainbow* and finding it unexpectedly underheated, Pauline Kael – though seldom a fan of the director's most flamboyant efforts – couldn't help but note with some regret that "Russell seems to have run out of bravura". That's not a charge that anyone's likely to level at the film the director delivered three years earlier. *Gothic* is Russell's take on the much-mythologised gathering of Lord Byron, Mary Godwin, her husband-to-be Percy Bysshe Shelley, her step-sister (and Byron's lover) Claire Clairmont, and Byron's physician/biographer John Polidori at the Villa Diodati near Lake Geneva during the so-called 'Year Without a Summer' of 1816, and it's about as lurid as one might desire. (Or fear. "Relentlessly hysterical… Laughable when it isn't sickening," was horror expert Howard Maxford's appalled verdict.)

The first of three films made about this particular constellation of Romantics during this period – Ivan Passer's *Haunted Summer* and Gonzalo Suárez's *Rowing with the Wind* would both follow in 1988 – *Gothic* remains the most disreputable and the most fun of the bunch. The material allows Russell to indulge his appetite for excess with some startling imagery – belly-dancing automata, a floating foetus, breasts with eyes, and so on – and to create a work that ultimately hews closer to Hammer than to heritage. Yet *Gothic* is far from being merely a puerile pleasure. For all its ostentatious, trashy elements, the ride it takes the viewer on is also an interior one – occurring not only in the hothouse atmosphere of the villa (Wrotham Park stands in for the Swiss residence) but also, crucially, in its protagonists' haunted, intoxicated, creative minds.

Following a clunky expository opening that establishes the group's fascination to gawping tourists eager for a peek through the window into Byron's bedroom, the film wastes no time whatsoever in getting down to business. Mary (Natasha Richardson), Claire (Myriam Cyr) and Shelley (Julian Sands) arrive in manic style at the villa, with Shelley pursued by hysterical groupies. There they are greeted by Timothy Spall's Dr Polidori and Gabriel Byrne's laudanum-proffering Byron, who's presented here as a vampiric seducer, introduced with a Christopher Lee-as-Dracula flourish. Throughout, shrewd underplaying by Byrne mitigates the crudeness of this conception; at the other end of the scale, Spall's transformation across the film – from prissiness to masochism to crazed desperation – is one of the most disturbing elements.

The group's meeting, and the storytelling contest that took place at the villa, are of course based in historical fact. But Russell and screenwriter Stephen Volk use the occasion as a jumping-off point to get their – and the audience's – imaginations churning. The film's conceit is that, conjured during a séance, the protagonists' various fears and traumas, including Mary's loss of a child, collectively spawn a presence that is intent on tormenting them. From there, the film swerves full-tilt into expressionism, blurring reality and hallucination, dreaming and waking states, and leading to a chillingly rendered vision of the protagonists' fates.

Sketchy in some departments, Volk's script proves astute in its allusions – from *Fantasmagoriana*, the 1812 anthology that inspired the group's own ghostly storytelling, to Henry Fuseli's 1781 painting *The Nightmare*; these references are given imaginative cinematic life by Russell. Resonating directly with the tradition that Raymond Durgnat termed 'Great British Phantasmagoria', *Gothic* is best described as meta-gothic, for essentially it's an origin story: an imaginative account of the creation of both Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and, more suggestively, of Polidori's novella *The Vampyre* (1819). A common criticism of the film was that it failed to give a sense of the protagonists as artists, but *Gothic* is, in fact, a work deeply – one might say religiously – preoccupied with creation, and it cleverly weaves references to its main intertexts into its visual scheme. Indeed, *Frankenstein* is referred to directly only at the very end, in a contemporary coda that's about as awkward as the opening sequence, but which at least succeeds in bringing the film full circle.

The hokier aspects of *Gothic* are, ultimately, indivisible from its potency as a self-conscious, postmodern creation myth. Less than 90 minutes long, it zips along, driven by Thomas Dolby's exhilarating score and brisk cutting by Russell's long-time editor Michael Bradsell. It looks a treat, too, in the BFI's HD transfer, which shows off to advantage Mike Southon's photography, the details of Christopher Hobbs's production design and Michael Buchanan's art direction. But beyond the visual pleasure, time has also deepened the picture's poignancy. The premature deaths of Richardson, whose beautiful performance gives the film its soul, and recently of Sands, whose touchingly eager, rather amateurish acting creates an oddly endearing Shelley, must haunt any viewing of the film today.

Like the affectionate, informative commentary by scholar Matthew Melia and Russell's widow Lisi Russell, a 2017 interview with Sands featured among the extras in the new BFI edition was previously included on the film's 2018 US Lionsgate release; Sands reflects with feeling and intelligence on his teenage connection to Shelley's work and the collaboration with Russell. A new interview with Volk, who talks openly about his inspiration for and shifting perspective on the film, is equally illuminating. Two contrasting, judiciously chosen micro-budget films from either end of Russell's career complete the excellent package. The 1958 short *Amelia and the Angel* remains an evergreen charmer. The same can't be said for the 2002 Poe parody *The Fall of the Louse of Usher*, one of Russell's late set of self-financed DIY offerings. The cheapo horror-musical-comedy features Russell as a mad German doctor administering shock treatment to a rock star found guilty of murder. Apart from scattered moments of inspired, self-parodic lunacy – look out for the inflatable doll orgy – this is one for completists only. But it offers conclusive, heartening proof that Russell's wild side always remained intact.

LATE ROMANTICS
Natasha Richardson and Julian Sands as Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley

IMAGE: BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

Oppenheimer

Rerunning this comparatively cheap, leisurely predecessor to Christopher Nolan's big-screen blockbuster is a perfect example of the sort of thing the BBC should be doing with its unrivalled archive of television drama

Barry Davis; UK/US 1980; BBC iPlayer, 7 episodes; English SDH

BY ROBERT HANKS

For a long time, the BBC sat on its archive of old television like a dragon on its hoard. Award-winning, much-loved programmes would moulder there over the decades, unrepeated, unstreamed, unissued on home media; and if some techno-hobbit uploaded a *Play for Today* or a *World About Us* nature documentary to YouTube, the BBC would swoop down to have it replaced by a note to the effect that the copyright holder couldn't be doing with that sort of thing. Presumably the difficulty of negotiating rights and payments has a lot to do with this; but it has also felt as though the Corporation doesn't understand what an asset it possesses.

In the last year or so, though, the BBC has begun to show signs of grasping that it is the guardian of an important cultural resource, and that TV programmes ought to be watched. Classic dramas and documentaries have shown up on BBC4 and iPlayer with a new regularity. At one point, some editor seemed to be working out a private Ken and Em fetish: in fairly rapid succession, we got Kenneth Branagh's stark performance in Graham Reid's 'Billy Plays' (1982-84 – see *Sight and Sound,* Winter 2022-23); Emma Thompson's startlingly authentic Glaswegian art student turned rock 'n' roll revivalist, opposite an arsey, charismatic Robbie Coltrane, in John Byrne's *Tutti Frutti*; and then the two of them – on their way to a brief reign as heirs to Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh – utterly convincing as middle-class English intellectuals adrift in history in the World War II drama *Fortunes of War* (these last were both shown in 1987: Thompson's Best Actress Bafta the following year was for the pair). *Tutti Frutti* is on iPlayer till December, but *Fortunes of War*, like too many other classic series (*The Roads to Freedom*, 1970; *Boys from the Blackstuff*, 1982) flitted past in a month. One-off plays have also begun to crop up at random intervals, including Stephen Poliakoff's wrenching *She's Been Away* (1989), with Peggy Ashcroft in her last role, as an elderly woman who has spent most of her life in a psychiatric hospital – that's around until well into 2024. On the documentary side, Jacob Bronowski's *The Ascent of Man* (1973), which by itself virtually justifies the invention of television, let alone the licence fee, is around for the next 11 months, but there's not much time to catch Robert Hughes's polemical history of modern art *The Shock of the New*, which felt like a wind from a new continent in 1980, but now has something of a whiff of stale testosterone.

A lot of this archive content has sneaked into the schedules with minimal fuss, as though the BBC is still a little embarrassed by its past – too genteel? too dated? too lefty? But the recent revival of *I, Claudius* (1976) – which I'll write about in a future issue – got fanfares and a well-orchestrated publicity campaign, with surviving cast members turning up all over BBC radio. And in August, a rerun of the 1980 biographical drama *Oppenheimer* was timed to catch the wave of publicity accompanying Christopher Nolan's film: it's almost like the BBC wanted people to watch it.

What people will make of it is another matter. In its day, *Oppenheimer* went down well with the critics; it won a Bafta for Best Drama series – another went to Carl Davis's racing, Kurt Weill-tinged score – while series, scriptwriter Peter Prince and Sam Waterston's central performance all got nominations here and in the US. Aspects of it have not worn well: the drastic shift in picture quality when the action moves from filmed outdoor locations to videoed studio-bound interiors doesn't get any easier to swallow as the years pass. At times, the pacing is lumpy, and the cast doesn't always cohere. Critics at the time raved about Manning Redwood, who plays General Leslie Groves, overall director of the Manhattan Project (the Matt Damon role in the film): he "grabs you and holds like a steel claw", the *Financial Times* said, while Clive James in the *Observer* called his performance "one of the best I have seen on television". To me, he looks stagy, with gear-shifts too visible, at times a slightly cartoonish stolidity – out of sync with the far more naturalistic, mercurial Waterston as J. Robert Oppenheimer.

In other ways, though, it stands up quite impressively; if nothing else, it offers an interesting corrective to Nolan's picture of Oppenheimer's life in science, the building of the atomic bomb and the persecution he faced afterwards. There is a lot of overlap between film and TV versions – both rely, to a large extent, on the same sources, so that some of the dialogue, particularly during the Atomic Energy Commission's 1954 hearings on Oppenheimer's security clearance, is identical. But the TV series, constrained by budgets, liberated by a seven-hour running time, doesn't offer any of Nolan's visions of roiling suns or black holes engorging themselves on stars; the building of the atom bomb is less a matter of lone genius and the mysteries of science than of the dynamics of a team and the technical difficulties, dead ends and kludges involved in making a device. A bonus is that other players emerge as distinct personalities – Enrico Fermi, barely a name-drop in the film, gets a memorably sympathetic, humane characterisation by Edward Hardwicke. Waterston's performance makes a big difference: where Cillian Murphy suggests a mystic, functioning with difficulty at a human scale, Waterston – following where Prince's scripts point – is more worldly, more charming, a more plausible candidate to run a huge bureaucratic project, but also more egotistical, worse-tempered, at times immature. The other outstanding piece of acting is David Suchet's Edward Teller, the Hungarian scientist obsessed with building the 'super', the H-bomb – the villain of the piece, if there is one, but a villain too dynamic and charismatic to dislike: he gets the real darkness in Teller, and a diabolic energy and certainty that clash with Waterston's compromising, compromised Oppenheimer. Perhaps this isn't one of the real jewels in the BBC's archives; but releasing it now allows a dialogue between a drama of today and one of 40 years ago that is almost as gripping as what's taking place on screen.

REMEMBER LOS ALAMOS
Sam Waterston as J. Robert Oppenheimer

VISIBLE SECRET

Ann Hui; Hong Kong 2001; Radiance; Region B Blu-ray; in Cantonese, with English subtitles; Certificate 15; 101 minutes; 16:9. Extras: interview with Ann Hui; visual essay by Alexandra Heller-Nicholas; making-of feature; trailer; booklet.

REVIEWED BY TONY RAYNS

Although it was a hit in Hong Kong and Taiwan at the time, Ann Hui's ghost extravaganza *Visible Secret* (*Youling Ren Jian*, literally 'Between Ghosts and People') has had no international distribution before this very welcome release. Hui had paused her film career for a couple of years after making her most engaged political movie *Ordinary Heroes* (1999) and had been teaching at her alma mater, the University of Hong Kong; the invitation to make a ghost story – four years into Hong Kong's new identity as a 'Special Administrative Region' of China – came from Jackie Chan's then-manager Willie Chan, who had executive-produced Stanley Kwan's ghost story *Rouge* in 1987. The proposal to make an apolitical genre movie must have appealed. In the interview included as an extra on the disc, Hui says it was her idea to enlist Abe Kwong, an established commercial writer-director with several ghost stories to his credit, to write the script.

Hui is no more or less superstitious than the average Hong Konger, but she had form in the genre. Her debut feature *The Secret* (1979), a true-crime story, largely set (like *Visible Secret*) in the north-western districts of Hong Kong Island, the area least marked by development and 'modernisation', features a key character who may or may not be dead. And her follow-up *The Spooky Bunch* (*Zhuang Dao Zheng*, 1980), set on the offshore island of Cheung Chau, which also reappears here, is an elaborate fantasia about a haunted opera troupe, albeit shot hand-held, as if it were a documentary.

Like those earlier movies, *Visible Secret* centres on ghosts who manifest themselves to right perceived historical wrongs. Its protagonist Peter Wong (an unemployable barber capably played by the singer Eason Chan) is targeted by two aggrieved spirits: one beheaded by a tram, an incident for which he blames Peter's father, the other a woman who committed suicide on Cheung Chau when her lover abandoned her. Peter is guided through both hauntings by the otherworldly June, aka Siu-Kam, whose real identity remains a 'visible secret' until the closing scenes; she is memorably played by the young Taiwanese actress Shu Qi (referred to by her Cantonese name Shu Kei in the Hui interview), already maturing into the talent who would go on to captivate Hou Hsiao-hsien.

With a strong supporting cast and serviceable digital effects, the film presents a stream of supernatural events, often using rapid cross-cutting to link apparently unrelated characters. The effect is strikingly different from western ghost movies, which usually feature set-piece hauntings. Hui's achievement is to suggest throughout that the lives of the living and the dead intersect at all times – equally relevant to the Hong Kong of 2023.

DISC: An exemplary transfer with generally useful booklet essays and extras. Sadly the visual essay lacks insight into Ann Hui's work in the genre and mispronounces the key Chinese names.

PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE

Jean Renoir; France 1946; BFI; Region B Blu-ray; b&w; in French, with English subtitles; Certificate PG; 40 minutes; 1.37:1. Extras: 2003 audio commentary by Philip Kemp; programme of outtakes held by the Cinemathèque française; 1936 screen tests; audio recording of 1963 Renoir NFT lecture; booklet

REVIEWED BY KATE STABLES

Jean Renoir abandoned this tender film featurette about a belle époque Parisian shopgirl's briefest of loves when its rainy shoot overran disastrously, so he could start on *The Lower Depths* (1936). After various failed attempts to reshoot or reshape it (including an appeal to Douglas Sirk, who refused to work on a film that was just "a magnificent torso"), Marguerite Renoir's sympathetic re-edit with added intertitles was a critical success on its 1946 release.

The film creates a lyrical snapshot of young Henriette's awakening, momentarily released from shop drudgery by a tryst with a passing stranger, during a sunny afternoon with her petit-bourgeois family. Renoir's adaptation of Maupassant's short story of predation and dashed hopes is laced with themes of entrapment, with two young rowers snaring Henriette (Sylvia Bataille) and her high-spirited mother, as if the women were appetising fish in the nearby river. Claude Renoir's camera bathes Henriette in sunlight, as she basks in unaccustomed freedom. But she's also raked by hungry male gazes, from would-be seducers, small boys and guilty seminarians alike (one priest is the actress's husband, the philosopher Georges Bataille).

In the least political of Renoir's 30s films, the sunny riverbank setting harks back to the impressionist paintings of Pierre-Auguste Renoir, the director's father, most strikingly in the swing scene, which recreates his *La Balançoire* (1876). Sylvia Bataille, whose fresh, open performance lights up that scene, was astonished that the fractious shoot could result in such a poignant, captivating film, deftly underpinned by Joseph Kosma's score, with its alternately playful and melancholy waltzes. Much of the film's warmth, however, comes from Renoir's own palpable joy in nature and his sympathy for human frailty, which softens Maupassant's sharp cynicism.

DISC: A very pretty transfer, provided with a handful of well-chosen extras. These include 80 minutes of outtakes, showing off the informal, family feel of Renoir's shoot. Try to spot the film's distinguished assistant directors, who included Jacques Becker, Yves Allégret and Henri Cartier-Bresson, plus set-dresser Luchino Visconti.

DOOR
DOOR II: TOKYO DIARY

Takahashi Banmei; Japan 1988/1991; Third Window Films; region-free Blu-ray; in Japanese, with English subtitles; Certificate 18; 94/82 minutes; 1.66:1/1.33:1. Extras: audio commentary for *Door* by Jasper Sharp: interview with Takahashi; trailers; booklet.

REVIEWED BY JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS

This is one of the more curious two-film packages from a distributor of late. For while Takahashi Banmei's *Door* (1988) and *Door II: Tokyo Diary* (1991) are ostensibly in the same series, they work within different genres.

Cited as one of the first Japanese films inspired by Italian *giallo*, *Door* (pictured above) is a home-invasion horror in which a stay-at-home mother (Takahashi Keiko, above) is harassed by a stalker salesman (Tsutsumi Daijirō). It's a slow-burn tale of terror, building to a gleefully gory showdown, including a particularly impressive long-take God's-eye-view sequence in which the protagonist runs through every room in her high-rise apartment, throwing anything she can at her assailant.

In contrast, *Door II: Tokyo Diary* plays like someone mislabelled the video file. No slasher, it's a compelling character study of a young call girl, albeit with one scene of shocking body horror; it's closer to 'pink' film, the genre of Japanese erotica in which Takahashi worked for much of his early career. It was conceived as an unrelated project, but Takahashi was promised a significant budget boost if he made *Tokyo Diary* a nominal sequel to *Door*, which had done well on video. This is the first official release for either film outside Japan.

Director's Company, a short-lived independent production outfit created to nurture young Japanese filmmakers outside the increasingly restrictive studio system, is the focus of a new Blu-ray series from Third Window. *Door II* not being a Director's Company production perhaps explains why it is not mentioned on this set's front cover, though it may be the more satisfying of the pair overall. Some of *Door*'s tension is marred by repeated use of one ill-fitting, peppy synth track, which works fine as opening credits music but less so as the score for attempted assault.

DISC: Jasper Sharp's thorough, enjoyable commentary for *Door* explores the history of the Director's Company, all key players in the first *Door*, Japanese cinema in the 1980s, and this whole odd franchise. Shot on Super 16 and standard 16mm respectively, both films' remasters impress – the blue and red tones of *Door II* in particular really pop.

TARGETS

Peter Bogdanovich; US 1968; BFI; Region B Blu-ray; English SDH; Certificate 15; 90 minutes; 1.85:1; Extras: introduction and audio commentary (both 2003) by Bogdanovich; audio commentary by critic Peter Tonguette; interviews with Joe Dante (2013), Boris Karloff's daughter Sara Karloff, and Karloff biographer Stephen Jacobs; video essay on Karloff by Vic Pratt; excerpts from *Guardian* lectures with Bogdanovich and Roger Corman; gallery; booklet.

REVIEWED BY GRAHAM FULLER

In 1967, Roger Corman offered Peter Bogdanovich the chance to direct his first movie on condition it featured Boris Karloff, who owed the producer two days' filming, and incorporated footage from *The Terror* (1963), Corman's botched Napoleonic-era horror film, which starred Karloff and Jack Nicholson.

Bogdanovich and production designer Polly Platt, his wife, devised a story requiring Karloff to channel himself as Byron Orlok, an urbane but jaded English star in Hollywood. Newly retired, Orlok reluctantly agrees to attend a drive-in screening of his latest gothic farrago (*The Terror* itself).

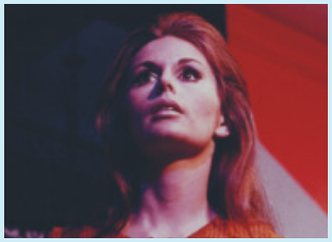
Bogdanovich intercuts between Orlok and Bobby Thompson (Tim O'Kelly), a Vietnam vet who carries out a mass shooting after killing his wife and mother – the character modelled on ex-Marine Charles Whitman, who killed 16 and wounded 31 in Austin, Texas, on 1 August 1966. Fated to meet, Orlok and Thompson respectively purvey escapist horror and carnage attributable to social malaise.

Bogdanovich's friend Sam Fuller overhauled his script, fixing the structure and finale. Since he refused a credit, Bogdanovich named Orlok's young director friend Sammy. In one meta scene, Sammy and Orlok, watching TV in Orlok's hotel, drunkenly extol Howard Hawks's direction of *The Criminal Code* (1930), Karloff's breakthrough film.

Devotee of Hollywood auteurs, Bogdanovich absorbed their lessons. *Targets* immediately indicated he was a Hawksian-style classicist: Orlok's inexorable silent stride toward Thompson at the climax recalls John Wayne marching toward Montgomery Clift near the end of *Red River* (1948). Commentator Peter Tonguette notes how Thompson's ignoring of his doomed wife's good-night kiss is the sour obverse of Scotty welcoming Lisa's wake-up kiss in *Rear Window* (1954); the film's patient scrutiny of a fastidious psychopath is Hitchcockian, too.

When Thompson gets Orlok's head in his rifle's crosshairs early on, he evokes Lee Harvey Oswald. A forerunner of *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Targets* was released minimally in 1968 because of the Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King assassinations. Louise Stratten, Bogdanovich's second wife and the sister of his murdered girlfriend Dorothy Stratten, said recently that he had been so sickened by the 2012 cinema killings in Aurora, Colorado, that he regretted making *Targets*. Yet no film was more prescient in urging gun control before it became a political issue.

DISC: The 2K digital restoration emphasises Bogdanovich's use of shadows and the dispiriting suburban LA locations. Tonguette praises *New York Times* film critic Renata Adler for recognising Bogdanovich's equating of gun violence with the film's metaphorically weaponised screen; Sara Karloff's appreciation of her father includes lively anecdotes and reveals the pride he took in co-founding and belonging to the Screen Actors Guild.



MESSIAH OF EVIL

Willard Huyck, Gloria Katz; US 1973; Radiance Films; region-free Blu-ray; English SDH; Certificate 15; 89 minutes; 2.35:1. Extras: audio commentary by critics Kim Newman and Stephen Thrower; archival interview with Huyck; feature on early 1970s horror and American indie cinema; visual essay by Kat Ellinger on American gothic and female hysteria; booklet.

REVIEWED BY ARJUN SAJIP

In 1973, as if to exemplify the before-and-after of the California hippie scene – the early 60s, with its burgeoning sense of optimism, and the early 70s, when the dreams began to curdle – two very different products from the husband-and-wife screenwriting team Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz were completed. One was George Lucas's nostalgic coming-of-ager *American Graffiti*; the other was Huyck and Katz's directorial debut, *Messiah of Evil*, now finally available in a transfer worthy of its unsettling compositions, eerie lighting and endlessly beguiling use of colour.

A young woman, Arletty (Marianna Hill), heads to the town of Point Dune on the West Coast in search of her missing artist father. Ignoring warnings from a jumpy gas-station attendant – cf *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, made shortly afterwards – she reaches the town, which turns out to be not so much sleepy as cataleptic.

Much of the movie's appeal lies in its cultivation of atmosphere. The supporting cast is key: Bennie Robinson, in his only film performance, as a creepy trucker, Elisha Cook Jr, saucer-eyed and wet-lipped, as a shambling prophet, and Royal Dano, in fine vocal fettle, as Arletty's father Joseph. But it's Jack Fisk and Joan Mocine's art direction that stands out: Joseph's house, with its murals of escalators and verandas that pretend to extend the building's space but simply reinforce its dead ends, is one of the great sets of 1970s horror.

The movie's best-known set pieces – a supermarket zombie attack that presages *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), and a chilling scene in a cinema, where the undead audience finish watching the movie before descending on their victim – are winkingly humorous. But the film also seems haunted by history. The Messiah of the title is a supposed survivor of the Donner Party, and the lapping Pacific seems like a taunting rebuke to would-be pilgrims: what do you do when you run out of land? In this nightmare vision of America, a cannibal holocaust seems only logical.

DISC: The transfer brings out those deep reds, inky blacks and enveloping blues beautifully. The bonus material – hours of illuminating content on the disc, and five contextual essays in the booklet – is generous.

L'AVENTURIER

Marcel L'Herbier; France 1934; Pathé; region-free Blu-ray & DVD dual format; in French, with English subtitle option; 95 minutes; 1.37:1. Extras: interview feature '*Créer c'est adapter*'

REVIEWED BY TONY RAYNS

Marcel L'Herbier (1888-1979) was a key figure for a long span of French film history, from the 1920s silent avant-garde to TV in the 50s via a stint as head of the Cinémathèque française and his role as founder of the film school IDHEC. Some of his silent classics have reached home video (notably his spectacular update of Zola's *L'Argent*, 1928), but this fine edition of the 1934 drama *L'Aventurier* (*The Adventurer*) seems to be the first of his talkies to be restored and reissued. Judging by this example, Pathé should get working on more of them.

Like many of L'Herbier's early talkies, it's based on a play (by Alfred Capus, first staged in 1910) – which L'Herbier adapted extensively. Étienne Ranson (the Belgian actor Victor Francen, six years before Charles Boyer introduced him to Hollywood to escape the German occupation) is the black-sheep nephew of an industrialist family in Grenoble; he has gone into exile while the family clears up the unspecified messes he has left behind. We first see him in North Africa, selling off (at gunpoint!) a lucrative salt mine just as it comes under armed attack. Lured by feelings for his childhood sweetheart, he returns to Grenoble – and finds the family's glove factory beset by financial woes and industrial unrest. Worse, his youthful crush Geneviève (Gisèle Casadesus, charming) is engaged to the very politician who denounces Ranson's colonial adventures in parliament. Ranson steps in to resolve the labour disputes, save the family business and work through his relationship with Geneviève.

The film's politics are ambiguous. The anti-bourgeois satire of the family is cutting, and the sympathetic treatment of workers' grievances looks forward to 1936's Popular Front government, but the North African salt miners are expendable and the colonial ethos isn't seriously questioned. There are flashes of L'Herbier's inspired pictorialism, but the overall style and film language are faithful to the Hollywood model: L'Herbier delivers pans, tracking shots and wipes with elegance, plus a satisfyingly improbable romantic resolution. The young Jean Marais (billed as 'Maray') makes his screen debut as a lively young worker.

DISC: First-rate restoration. The sole extra isn't subtitled, but non-speakers of French aren't missing much.

The Queen's Guards

The royalist, imperialist elements of Michael Powell's last major British production – set around the annual ceremony of Trooping of the Colour – left critics confused and irritated. But its Technicolor glories are still hard to resist

Michael Powell, UK 1961

BY JO BOTTING

As Britain's most original and imaginative filmmaker, Michael Powell's features have been extensively remastered, rereleased and pored over by academics and critics. But one or two titles have fallen between the cracks, most notably his last major British feature, *The Queen's Guards*. Shot in 1960 and released in October 1961, the film has a rather poor reputation, seen as *arrière-garde* in stark contrast to his preceding feature *Peeping Tom* (1960), which British cinema was clearly not ready for. Powell was still dealing with censorship issues relating to *Peeping Tom* when he began pre-production on *The Queen's Guards*. Securing funding from Twentieth Century-Fox, he set up Imperial Films with Sydney Streeter, who had worked on several Archers films in production roles, the choice of company name hinting at the film's tone.

The Queen's Guards was not a personal project but originated in an idea by Powell's friend Simon Harcourt-Smith, author of rather esoteric books, including *The Last of Uptake* (1942), an 'architectural fantasy' illustrated by Rex Whistler. Finding himself outside Buckingham Palace one day, Harcourt-Smith mused on what secrets the guards' poker-faces might conceal, and the story was born.

His treatment was expanded by Roger Milner, an actor/writer who was more comfortable with stage farce than film and whose screenplay ran to over 200 pages. Despite judicious cutting by Powell both on set and in the editing room, the first version was an unwieldy two and a half hours long. Further pruning reduced it to its eventual 110-minute running time, the main excision being a section depicting Mau Mau activity in Kenya.

The editing process was made trickier by Milner's complex flashback structure, which portrays the progression of guardsman John Fellowes from cadet to a key role in the Queen's birthday ceremony. Powell's vision for the film is clear from his notes to editor Noreen Ackland: "Give me a picture where the parade... is the only thing that matters" – and the film undoubtedly offers an impressive record of the Trooping of the Colour as staged on 11 June 1960. These sequences apparently required nine huge three-strip Technicolor cameras, strategically placed to capture events from all possible angles.

The opening credits lay out Powell's stall, the slickly constructed montage of behind-the-scenes shots of preparations for the annual pageant kicking off the film in a suitably stirring manner. Powell was aware that it depended on the presentation of the ceremony for both its temporal structure and its visual impact and the CinemaScope footage emphasises the event's sheer scale, while also revelling in its precise choreography.

From the broad sweep of the Trooping of the Colour, the film immerses us in the life and thoughts of John Fellowes, played by Daniel Massey, in his first leading role. He adeptly portrays Fellowes's journey into manhood and emergence from the shadow of a heroic father and older brother to earn his own place in military history. As film historian Ian Christie has noted, the focus on the father and son relationship (reinforced by the casting of Raymond Massey as Fellowes Snr) echoes Powell's exploration of the effects of parental behaviour in *Peeping Tom*.

As John's rival-turned-friend Henry Wynne-Walton, Robert Stephens gives an equally compelling performance, while Ian Hunter's turn as laconic haulage contractor Dobbie is one of the film's highlights. Thanks to Powell's careful casting, the actors largely manage to resist the script's tendency to nudge characters into caricature, though Milner's dialogue, littered with military jargon like 'huzziff' and 'jankers', and pre-War attitudes to Empire impede identification.

Watched today, the film is perplexing but fascinating. Publicity material tried to reconcile its various selling-points, ranging from HM The Queen in her first feature to "Guest star Jess Conrad", adding pop tunes and sex appeal to what might have seemed a stuffy affair. The pressbook imagery contrasts the Guards' ceremonial role with their battle activity – specifically, an extended North African sequence in which the barbarism of local warring factions is one of the film's less palatable depictions. Meanwhile, *Woman's Own* had a colour spread on Swiss couturier Mattli's costumes, as worn by Elizabeth Shepherd and Judith Stott.

The reactions of the critics on the film's release reflected their confusion. Some found it overly jingoistic, its glorification of war and 'putting down the natives' anachronistic. But most recognised that Powell had managed to rise above stodgy material to create something visually impressive, Alexander Walker waxing especially lyrical in his *Evening Standard* review: "As a pageant it is breath-taking. As a military ballet it knocks the Bolshoi into the wings. As tourist bait it is worth its weight in Fort Knox gold."

Several reviewers took the opportunity to reflect on Powell's career, the *Times* characterising him as "an individualist running riot in an art/industry inclined to imitation and conformity", while Dilys Powell asserted that "the true filmmaker is still there, the man who understands what camera-plus-movement can do."

Powell himself dismissed *The Queen's Guards* as "the most inept piece of filmmaking that I have ever produced or directed", conceding that "we should not have tried to compete with A.E.W. Mason" – author of the much-filmed imperial adventure story *The Four Feathers* (1902). Having invested £280,000 in the film, Twentieth Century-Fox deemed it "unacceptable to American exhibitors" – a seemingly perverse decision, given the affection of Americans for the British monarchy and its pomp. In 1964 Powell contemplated acquiring the rights to release it there himself, but was advised he was unlikely to profit from it.

The widely held view that *Peeping Tom* killed Powell's career may be too simplistic: barely recouping its negative costs, this film's failure cannot have enhanced his chances of further funding. Yet, while undoubtedly flawed and problematic, *The Queen's Guards* deserves to be seen in its original widescreen Technicolor glory, so it can be reassessed and reintegrated into Powell's filmography. Hopefully it will emerge from obscurity soon.

The Queen's Guards will be screened at BFI Southbank, London, on 2 November: tickets at whatson.bfi.org.uk

UP, GUARDS, AND AT 'EM! Robert Stephens as Henry Wynne-Walton, Daniel Massey as John Fellowes

IMAGE: BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

The laughing policeman: Stanley Schtinter's Last Movies

The artist-curator's book and accompanying film programmes recalibrate the history of cinema according to the final films watched by a selection of its icons

BY IAIN SINCLAIR

BELOW
Charlie Chaplin in *The Kid* (1921)

OPPOSITE, TOP
James Whale's *Waterloo Bridge* (1931)

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM
Stanley Schtinter

The tall young man, hair flopping over steady stare, is uniformed in black with ominously polished boots. He says that he hails from Yorkshire, an occasional stonewaller. And he lets you know that you don't have to believe any of the above: name and rank is provisional for Stanley Schtinter. He is that new thing, a renegade artist-curator. With the emphasis on artist. And also, anecdotally, a committed transnational avant-garde provocateur. A promiscuous gleaner, modest huckster, ethical conman, *houngan* of cinematic Vodou. Deliverer of dangerous gifts.

I asked him, when he guided me, an old blind Oedipus, through the scattered London locations he had chosen for exhibition of the 70 films I'd been tasked with nominating for my 70th year to represent the furies of a lifetime of waning cinephilia, what was with this Hoxton guerrilla kit, the parade ground footwear. He said it was his ambition to be a fancy-dress policeman at the Sherlock Holmes Museum. He had the height and weaponised civility, but the authorities spiked every application. Stanley fancied the gig because it involved being photographed with visitors. He plotted to gather up a copy of each image and to collate them into a vast grid. A project that tame bureaucrats would be seduced into promoting as a conceptual masterpiece. Art concepts, like old Hollywood pitches, have to be summarised on a fingernail.

From the start, Schtinter identified a future of inventing proposals so outrageous that they felt inevitable. Specifics didn't matter so long as the originating material was totally exhausted and drained of content. The pitch must be enough to authorise another procession of obedient Schtinter pilgrims, the ones he calls "pallbearers for the lost art of mutual aid". The long march to a screening that may not happen requires stamina. "A pointless journey," Schtinter told me, "becomes a political act – and whether or not the film is any good is secondary to the process of doing it." *Last Movies* sounds like a neat conclusion, but it is just the beginning of another rebrand, from curation to authorship. And back again, down the spiral of suspended time, to a parallel screening you can enter at any point and never quit.

Newly arrived and culture-deprived in Peckham Rye, every move Schtinter made, every subtle adjustment to his customised situationist brand, contributed towards the intertwined book and film manifestations of *Last Movies*: that chimera on the distant horizon. There were dues to be paid. Much was owed, as he would acknowledge, to twin mentors: the publisher/impressario Paul Smith and the writer/director Chris Petit. Smith, guiding intelligence of record label Blast First and the various event/provocations of Disobey, masterminded numerous cross-fertilisations of musicians, poets and imported ghosts from countercultural prehistory. The Bridewell Theatre, off Fleet Street, then managed by Jonathan Jones – who later saluted Schtinter's pub tour *EastEnders Lock-In* installation for its mastery of elective boredom – conceded a few days for Smith to stage his *Subversion in the Street of Shame*, featuring Alan Moore, Kathy Acker, John Healy and the dying Robin Cook (aka Derek Raymond). Performance artist Brian Catling, in Cyclops mode, crawled beneath a stage erected over a former swimming pool.

What Schtinter learned from Smith was that a successful strategy required "endless afternoons in pubs". The 96-hour, but essentially infinite *Lock-In* project was born, not as a fashionable mash-up but a slicing away of inessentials, everything that happened *outside* the Queen Vic, in order to arrive at the kernel of socio-hysterical tedium: that shrieking but silenced close-up, those interpersonal and interspecies collisions flooding from the sweating screens of cash-only or shrewdly revamped East London boozers.

Smith approved Schtinter's thesis, now underwritten through collaborations with Petit, that duration is an absolute. The off-grid director knew that spaceship

earth was sliding from a state where everything was afternoon television towards the archival purgatory of posthumous dreams, towards *Last Movies*. Here was the endgame of endgames. A commendably perverse demonstration of how it is possible for something to be assimilated, by way of rumour and manipulated history, without being experienced. *Last Movies* derived its logic from Schtinter's Liberated Film Club in Shoreditch, where guests, with no prior knowledge of what was about to be screened, were invited to deliver introductions to "lost and suppressed films" (see Wide Angle, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 2021). The classic grin without the cat.

It was Petit who initiated Schtinter in the gambits of post-cinema (or "post-post-cinema", as he defined it): provocations with no funding agency and no expectation of an audience. Hiding out as caretaker and dog walker in a Petit property, deep inside the folk horror territory of *Penda's Fen* (1974) and with Europe in cryogenic hibernation, Schtinter produced an immaculate script for a seaside crime drama that Petit identified as his final feature. This was so good that the author of the original property refused to extend the rights. And, despite interest in Finland, nobody rushed to commission it. Perfect! Where Petit jumped borders as a brooding philosopher, called by *Le Monde* "the Robespierre of English cinema", Schtinter made the real-world deals: a ghost hotel in Poland or an obliging theatre in Porto, where an abridged 17-hour 'dry run' for *Last Movies* turned into a major conceptual challenge to Christian Marclay's *The Clock* (2010). Audiences soon discovered, like the celebrants in Buñuel's *The Exterminating Angel* (1962), that there was no exit. "People could not come and go," Schtinter reported, "and breaks were few. No phones, no fiddling. The nu-luddite revolution is imminent."

Schtinter turns the mass hallucination of our digital culture into purged acts of endurance and resurrection. This man mines that which is most resistant: a filmed memorial tribute to Brion Gysin, godfather of the cut-up method, became a series of fragmentary séances in the empty rooms of an imagined Hotel Bardo. *Last Movies* is the summation of an apocryphal gospel. In puritanical black, the witchfinder general of cultural complacency invades our cryogenic comas, recutting memory and bleeding myth into newsreel. The politics of reversed entropy.

Schtinter is a transnational avant-garde provocateur, a promiscuous gleaner, modest huckster, ethical conman, *houngan* of cinematic Vodou

The *Last Movies* pitch is fingernail simple: recalibrate "the century of cinema according to the final films watched by a selection of its icons... *to see what those who no longer see last saw*". The Schtinter intervention is available in deluxe 60-hour totality or a convenient 24-hour edit as "a single artwork". Individual titles are not advertised or ticketed. "A day and a night in lived human experience."

Entries are highly selective, running from Kafka experiencing Chaplin's *The Kid* in 1921 to Jean-Luc Godard enjoying a terminal cigar while viewing his own *Funny Wars* in 2023 – and before, so Schtinter tells us, booking a taxi to carry him to a Swiss euthanasia facility. The director wasn't ill, he said, just "exhausted". He had lived through and interrogated so much of the trajectory of cinema history. There could be a follow-up project called 'Last Smokes'.

The Schtinter catalogue of farewell encounters is more intriguing than any orthodox critical round-up. Last movies can be accidental, programmed by fate, or something close to a deliberate statement. Assassinations of American 'icons', John Dillinger and Jack Kennedy, play against quiet post-prandial fades like George Cukor or Bernard Herrmann. Mortality's iris shots. What I relished, when I tried to view some of the nominations, out of sequence, was the way they enhanced the materiality of films with no obvious connections. How obligingly the silent screen mime of *The Lighthouse by the Sea* (1924) fuses with the studio fabricated London of James Whale's *Waterloo Bridge* (1931). And what happens to the quality of attention we pay when we are told that we are sharing the final programmes of Anne Frank and Bette Davis? Schtinter's published anecdotes are richer than truth. Highlighted coincidence and scandal in the tradition of Kenneth Anger has been programmed to send the casual reader straight back to the screen.

My ultimate frisson came when sampling Michel Gast's 1948 version of Boris Vian's *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* (*I Spit on Your Graves*). Stanley prepped me with a German-language DVD. Twenty minutes was enough, which was 15 more than Vian endured at the premiere. I was mesmerised by the momentum of mysterious actions, grey with threat, and loosely translated from a pastisched source in American pulp. Five minutes in, Vian rose to his feet and protested: "Call yourself Americans! My ass." Before dying of a theatrical heart attack.

Reviewing a reprint of the Vian novel in the *Guardian*, Petit spoke of an "authentic forgery" authored in post-war Paris and faking status as a censored original. "A work," he said, 20 years or so before Schtinter's Shoreditch film club, "of liberated imagination." And that was always Stanley's task. And his achievement.

SCHTINTER PORTRAIT: PAULO CUNHA MARTINS/BATALHA CENTRO DE CINEMA, PORTO

Stanley Schtinter's book *Last Movies* is published by Tenement Press, with parallel film programmes at Light Industry in New York on 4 November, and the ICA in London on 22 November, with subsequent monthly in-venue events until March 2024

THE CINEMA OF POWELL AND PRESSBURGER

EDITORS NATHALIE MORRIS & CLAIRE SMITH
PUBLISHER BLOOMSBURY/BFI
PAGES 216
ISBN 9781838719173

REVIEWED BY PHILIP KEMP

Along with his other talents, Alexander Korda had a knack for teaming. It was he who introduced Carol Reed to Graham Greene, whose partnership spawned *The Fallen Idol* (1948), *The Third Man* (1949) and *Our Man in Havana* (1959). And a decade earlier, it was again Korda who had linked up the Kent-born Michael Powell with the Hungarian-Jewish Emeric Pressburger, who together became The Archers – creators of more than a dozen feature films that, as editors Nathalie Morris and Claire Smith say in the introduction to their book on the pair, "were rich in passion, invention and fantasy".

The book is a pleasure to read, full of generous appreciations of Powell and Pressburger's work from a multitude of personal angles. It's also lavishly illustrated, not so much with stills from the movies as with production designs, costume designs and storyboard drawings, most of them by regular members of The Archers unit, including production designers Alfred Junge and Ivor Beddoes, costume designer Hein Heckroth and art director Arthur Lawson. Along with special effects pioneer W. Percy Day, cinematographers Erwin Hillier, Jack Cardiff and Chris Challis, and composers Allan Gray and Brian Easdale, they all worked as members of an intensely collaborative team – "a collective practice" (to quote the book's introduction again) "that was as fulfilling and transformative as the productions themselves".

Though stimulating and evocative, this book may not be the ideal introduction for anyone unfamiliar with the full corpus of Powell and Pressburger's films. While many of their titles are dealt with in detail, others are passed over with little more than brief mentions. *The Small Back Room* (1949) shows up four times in the index; *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (1942) three times; *The Battle of the River Plate* (1956) and *The Elusive Pimpernel* (1950) just twice – and of each we learn scarcely more than its title. (In the case of *Pimpernel* this isn't perhaps so surprising; Powell hated it and called it "a really terrible mess".) For a more comprehensive overview of their output, Ian Christie's *Arrows of Desire: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger* (Waterstones, 1985) or Andrew Moor's *Powell and Pressburger: A Cinema of Magic Spaces* (I.B. Tauris, 2005) might make better starting-points.

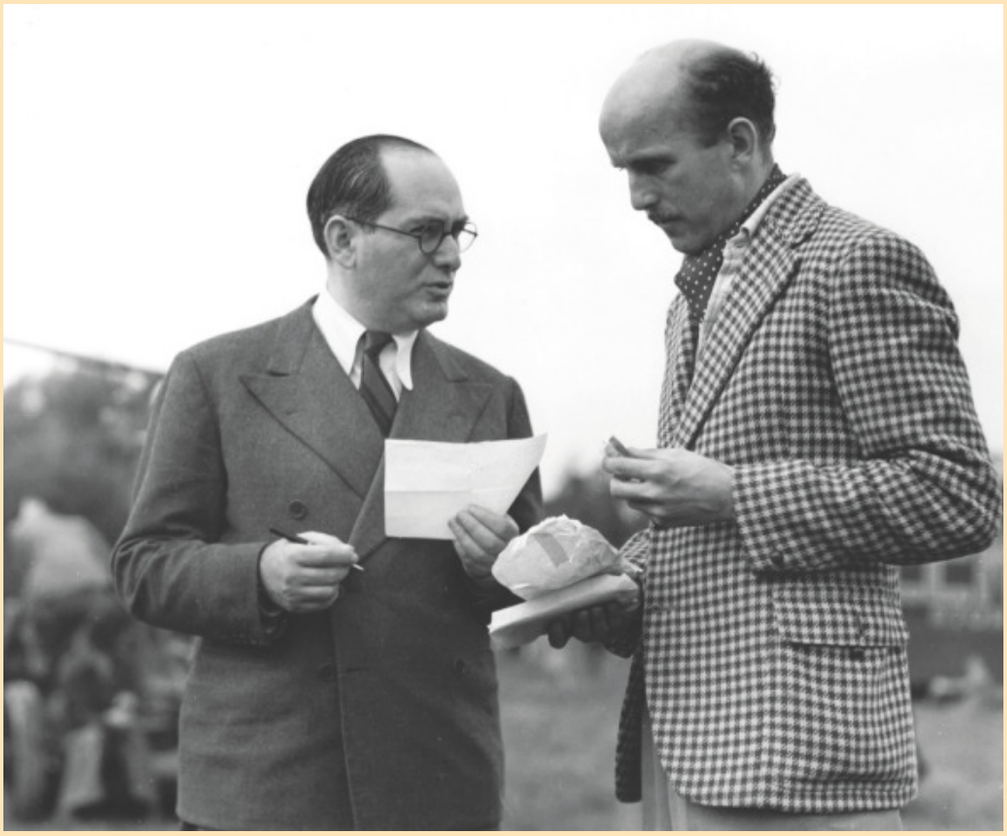
But this reservation apart, lovers of The Archers' work will find plenty here to intrigue and delight them (and in some cases, perhaps, to question their assumptions). Particular pleasure lies in the wealth of illustrations: Mahesh Rao's piece on *Black Narcissus* (1947) is followed by 12 pages of photos, drawings and documents relating to the film; Marina Warner's essay on *The Red Shoes* (1948) by no less than 19. (Besides these, there are frequent pictures interspersed within the texts.) We're also shown handwritten letters and notes sent by Powell to Pressburger, sharing their ideas and making suggestions. We even have a telegram, sent during the post-production on *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), in which Powell tells Pressburger "our american partners still crazy about amolad still urging us change title love and kisses micky". (It was eventually released in the US as *Stairway to Heaven*.)

The book is full of generous appreciations of Powell and Pressburger's work – and is lavishly illustrated with production designs, costume designs and storyboard drawings

The book's most challenging passages occur in Rao's piece on *Black Narcissus*, in which he focuses on the role of the 'Young General' played by the Indian actor Sabu (who, in 1940, had taken the title role in Korda's *The Thief of Bagdad*, co-directed by Powell). For Rao, Indian-born himself, the Young General seems to represent a "curiously sexless figure, cloying and obsequious.... There is an invitation to be charmed by this enthusiastic man-boy but it comes edged with ridicule." This uncomfortable hint of racial condescension in the character's portrayal tempers Rao's appreciation of the film's "irresistible" visual language and its "intense engagement with a sense of place".

Other contributors evince no such misgivings. Marina Warner evokes the way *The Red Shoes* "involves us in ambiguities that after any number of viewings continue to tantalise and grip the imagination". She contrasts how Hans Christian Andersen, in the story from which the film is derived, "avoids facing up to the erotic", whereas "for Powell and Pressburger [eroticism is] the beating heart of the matter, which they approach through this extraordinary tour de force of innovative ballet-on-film". Sarah Street, exploring The Archers' distinctive use of colour, notes the subtle shadings between the differing treatments of the three time zones in their first colour film, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) – and then traces how in a sequence of their creations from *A Matter of Life and Death* through *Black Narcissus*, *The Red Shoes* and *Gone to Earth* (1950) to *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951) they attained what Heckroth, production and costume designer on *Hoffmann*, described as "an exercise in pure colour". For his part, *Vogue* photographer Tim Walker admires "the fact that Powell and Pressburger were not afraid to embrace the wholeheartedly artificial".

In short, we have here a celebration of what *Barbie* production designer Sarah Greenwood calls the "pure alchemy" of The Archers' films at their best. The combination of Powell's poetic Englishness and Pressburger's Hungarian romanticism, together with the rich contributions of their multinational co-creators – many of them, like Pressburger, refugees from Nazism – gave rise to a body of work that still rewards repeated viewings, and that this book explores from a range of viewpoints that seem to mirror the multiplicity of the team behind the films themselves. The last word might go to Tilda Swinton, who prefaces the volume with a loving tribute: "You Archers: your pirate soul on the high seas of cinema is everlastingly buoyant... Your territory is borderless and your skies are freedom itself."



BELOW
Emeric Pressburger and Michael Powell

IMAGE: BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

THE RED SHOES

AUTHOR	PAMELA HUTCHINSON
PUBLISHER	BLOOMSBURY/BFI FILM CLASSICS
PAGES	112
ISBN	9781839026065

REVIEWED BY HANNAH MCGILL

Like the artform it depicts, in which ethereal grace is achieved via punishing graft, *The Red Shoes* is a thing of contradictions. Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's 1948 ballet drama is beautiful confection, and a harrowing horror film. It is a passionate depiction of art and love which has rather dire things to say about the demands of each. It centres on a romance, yet offers no happy endings, and has a way of making us favour its cruel antagonist over its romantic lead. Its reputation is of swooning beauty, yet its climax is pure horror, and its message unavoidably bleak. It is a revered classic of British cinema, but its influences and references are richly international, while its flamboyance and intensity fly in the face of any expectation of stylistic or emotional reserve. And that intensity itself can have an ambivalent effect – even on those who love the film. "Almost every time I told someone I was writing about *The Red Shoes*," writes *Sight and Sound* contributor Pamela Hutchinson in this BFI Film Classic, "they gasped at the sound of its name. It is a dangerous film to watch at an impressionable age."

A lot to talk about, then. Every film is its own little universe, but not every film makes you wonder if one critical volume dedicated to its production, style and meanings will be enough. This slim book could certainly have been plumper with no loss of interest, but Hutchinson knows how to be both expansive and economical. She navigates her territory with an expert's confidence and a fan's enthusiasm, conveying meticulous research in a breezily communicative style that includes rather than instructs. She dances us through the practical and symbolic characteristics of ballet shoes, the film's fairytale origins in the work of Hans Christian Andersen, and the backstory, dramatis personae and impact of the production, towards a showpiece finale analysing the film's groundbreaking extended ballet sequence.

Particularly interesting are Hutchinson's insights into the complex reaction to the film of its star, Moira Shearer; and the film's somewhat contested status in the ballet world. As dispiriting as it is to learn that Shearer disliked her own performance for perceived imperfections in her dancing, or that ballet insiders found the film unnatural and excessively constructed, these details compel because they recall the torrid feelings at play in the film itself, in which dancing is sacred, impresarios dictate impossible terms in the name of excellence, and the individual artist is fated to fall short, even if only in her own eyes. So the themes of *The Red Shoes* echo through its own production narrative, and so this sprightly, generous and knowledgeable companion book brings both to life.

Hutchinson knows how to be both expansive and economical, with an expert's confidence and a fan's enthusiasm

THE RED SHOES

BEYOND THE NEW ROMANIAN CINEMA

ROMANIAN CULTURE, HISTORY, AND THE FILMS OF RADU JUDE

AUTHORS	ANDREI GORZO & VERONICA LAZĂR
PUBLISHER	LUCIAN BLAGA UNIVERSITY OF SIBIU PRESS
PAGES	246
ISBN	9786061219599

REVIEWED BY GEOFF ANDREW

Of the highly talented filmmakers associated with the New Romanian Cinema – which first fired festival-goers' imaginations in 2005 with Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* – it's fair to say that, alongside Puiu, Radu Jude has proved to be the most radical. While his first two features, *The Happiest Girl in the World* (2009) and *Everybody in Our Family* (2012), seemed largely characteristic of the New Romanian Cinema aesthetic – naturalistic observational accounts of 'everyday life', often evoking the passage of real time – it became apparent with the remarkable *Aferim!* (2015) and *Scarred Hearts* (2016), set, respectively, in 1835 and the 1930s, that Jude was happy to make forays into markedly different territory, in terms of both form and content. Indeed, in subsequent, increasingly experimental features (including his latest, the wonderful *Do Not Expect Too Much from the End of the World*), the writer-director has created work that is boldly his own: inventive, provocative, allusive, politically committed, concerned with history yet acutely alert to current events, sophisticated in its grasp of representation while engagingly casual in its freewheeling approach to story and technique. (*Do Not Expect...* is "even more amateurish than my last films".)

Gorzo and Lazăr's illuminating study locates Jude's extraordinary output both within the context of the development of the New Romanian Cinema and within the wider one of Romanian culture, history and politics. No one familiar with the features from *Aferim!* onwards (or his documentaries and shorts) could be unaware of the darker, more racist and right-ist aspects of Romania past and present; the authors point out that, in this, Jude is an heir to Lucian Pintilie, who in films like *The Reenactment* (1968) and *An Unforgettable Summer* (1994) opposed the nationalistic ethos of much Romanian cinema. They also shed light on elements in Jude's work less obvious to international viewers: the casting, say, of actors familiar from television, theatre or comedy revue, which enhances the films' strong satirical impulses. Likewise, an analysis of *Scarred Hearts* with reference to literary works by Max Blecher, on which the film is loosely based, is rewarding.

As well as contextualisating Jude's oeuvre for non-Romanians, the authors are adept in conveying the particular qualities of his work: the blend of seriousness and playfulness, the almost Godardian obsession with facts, figures, quotes and antecedents, and the audacious capacity to take off in unexpected, seemingly wayward directions, sometimes by including non-professional actors in the mix. Despite occasionally clumsy English translation, this is an erudite, insightful and pleasingly nuanced appreciation of one of the most fascinating filmmakers working today.

HOLLYWOOD LEGEND

One of the greats of 1930s Hollywood cinema and onwards, Rouben Mamoulian spoke to *Sight and Sound* at the tail end of his career, as he looked back on his journey from pre-Soviet Georgia to directing stars such as Greta Garbo and Fred Astaire in a string of indelible masterpieces

SIGHT AND SOUND, SUMMER 1961. INTERVIEW BY DAVID ROBINSON

Rouben Mamoulian – a big, patrician figure – looks a good ten years younger than 62, which he is. He chain-smokes cigars less with the air of a Hollywood success than of the son of a prosperous late 19th-century Armenian family, which he is also. He was born in 1898, not in Armenia, but in Tiflis [now Tbilisi], in Georgia. His barely perceptible accent – deepish r's and distinctive vowels – sounds Russian though. Both parents are still alive and well in Hollywood. His father was a banker, formerly a colonel in the Russian army. His mother came from too good a family to indulge her passion for the theatre, except as president of the Tiflis Dramatic Society.

The Mamoulian children were raised in an artistic and theatrical atmosphere. Tiflis then as now was the cultural centre of Southern Russia; and the Mamoulian home was a meeting place both for the resident intelligentsia and for the artists who visited the local theatres and whose performances Rouben and his sister generally saw. He recalls the great Kachalov reciting a scene from Julius Caesar at a party in the living room at home. "It was the greatest dramatic scene I ever saw."

When Rouben was seven the family went to Paris, where he was sent to the Lycée Montaigne. There, too, Madame Mamoulian organised charity performances in aid of the San Francisco Earthquake victims; and the letter of thanks she received from Theodore Roosevelt sparked Rouben's first curiosity about America. When he was 22 they moved back to Tiflis, and a few years later he was sent to Moscow University to read criminal law. An announcement on a university notice-board invited young people to join Vakhtangov's Studio at the Moscow Art Theatre; and young Mamoulian, having passed some sort of entrance test, spent several memorable months there. He remembers seeing Stanislavski: "A marvellous man with lucid blue eyes."

Back in Tiflis, about 1918, Mamoulian organised his own studio, which periodically presented short plays, and wrote theatre notices for the local paper for a season. ("It was unbearable.") Meanwhile his sister had married an Englishman; and on New Year's Eve, 1920, Rouben arrived in London to spend a holiday with her. He liked it and decided to stay. He needed work, "but was quite unfit for business". Happily, he ran into a fellow-expatriate who was looking for a producer for a new Russian repertory company. Mamoulian confidently recommended himself, and accepted the salary of 30 shillings a week and ten shillings during rehearsals, which took place in the old Russian Embassy in Belgrave Square.

As a result of the work he did with this company, he was invited by Austin Page and Vladimir Rosing to co-direct a play with a Russian setting, *The Beating on the Door*. He resigned after three days because he did not agree with the interpretation of his co-director, a man much his senior in years and experience. After five more days the backers saw his point, and he was brought back to replace the older man. This incident, added to Mamoulian's youth ("I was instructed to tell people I was 'about thirty'") and poor English ("It was the last of my eight languages"), did not endear him to the cast. "The first three days of rehearsal were the worst of my life. They were terribly polite, but their very politeness was like a dagger." Still, he survived, won them over and enjoyed a great personal success with the first night at the St. James's in November 1922. "The style of this production was the realism of the Moscow Art Theatre. Since then I have never done anything realistic. It gave me no satisfaction at all. It seems to me a completely wrong direction to take in the arts."

Now he received competing offers from Jacques Hebertot in Paris, who wanted him as producer at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées alongside Komisarjevsky

'Since a play in London in 1922 I have never done anything realistic. It gave me no satisfaction at all. It seems to me a completely wrong direction to take in the arts'

OPPOSITE
Rouben Mamoulian

ALL IMAGES: BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

MAMOU
MERCEDES
Chocolat

'Garbo asked me: "What do I play in the final scene?" I said: "I want your face to be a blank sheet of paper. I'd like it if you could avoid even blinking, so you're nothing but a beautiful mask." But everyone who has seen the film will tell you what she is thinking and feeling. And always it's something different. Each one writes his own ending to the film'

OPPOSITE
Greta Garbo in *Queen Christina* (1933)

ABOVE
Gary Cooper and Sylvia Sidney in *City Streets* (1931)

and Jouvet; and from George Eastman, who wanted him for his splendid new theatre in Rochester, where he hoped to organise an American opera company. In the face of "four or five days of Socratic dialogue" with Hebertot and a 300-word telegram from Eastman, he settled for America, because "As a boy at school in Paris I'd adored *Les Aventures de Buffalo Bill*; I remembered my mother's letter from Teddy Roosevelt; and anyway, I'd never seen such a long telegram."

Under Eastman's ice-grey and perceptive eyes, Mamoulian produced *Carmen*, *Faust*, Boris Godunov, as well as Gilbert and Sullivan and Viennese operettas. "Eastman, of course, was only interested in the musical aspects. I was already seeking a truly dramatic theatre, a theatre that would combine all the elements of movement, dancing, acting, music, singing, decor, lighting, colour and so on."

After two and a half years Mamoulian felt it time to leave Rochester, and went to New York, where the Theatre Guild engaged him as a teacher and director. It was for the Guild that he directed *Porgy*.

"*Porgy* made me overnight. In it I tried all my ideas of a dramatic integration of many elements... At this time I felt it should be possible, in a stage production, to take a snapshot of the stage picture at any moment, and record an artistic composition. So each movement and grouping was minutely rehearsed. The Black actors were often required to adopt poses which were neither comfortable nor natural, but which looked right on the stage. That's stage truth."

APPLAUSE (1929) AND CITY STREETS (1931)

"For five weeks I went around the Astoria Studios in New York, where I made *Applause* for Paramount, watching everything and asking questions. At the end I went to them and said, 'I'm ready.' If you have an eye it doesn't take you long...

"Now in those early days of sound, people just thought of films as being all dialogue – talk, talk, talk. I wanted to do things you couldn't do on the stage. I wanted to use a mobile camera; but that was *impossible* because the camera and the cameraman and the director and the assistant cameraman and probably the assistant directors were all squashed together in a sort of house on wheels. And all the sound was recorded on a single track – the mike picked up everything you didn't want it to. If you had a letter in a scene, it had to be soaked in water. Like that it didn't make a thunderous crackle, of course, but it looked like a Dalí watch.

'In the early days of sound, the mike picked up everything. If you had a letter in a scene, it had to be soaked in water. Like that it didn't make a thunderous crackle, but looked like a Dalí watch'

"The blow-up came on the third day. I wanted to shoot a scene entirely in one shot. It's where the girl – who's come to New York from a convent as a strip-teaser – is lying in bed in a cheap little hotel room. Her mother, played by Helen Morgan, sits beside her and sings to her the only kind of song she knows: a burlesque number, but she sings it as if it were a lullaby. As she sings the girl fingers a rosary and whispers a prayer. But, they said, we couldn't record the two things – the song and the prayer – on one mike and one channel. So I said to the sound man, 'Why not use two mikes and two channels and combine the two tracks in printing?' Of course it's general practice now; but the sound man and George Folsey, the cameraman, said it was impossible. So I was mad. I threw down my megaphone – all directors still used megaphones in those days – and ran up to [Paramount boss Adolph] Zukor's office. He was with [Paramount co-founder Jesse] Lasky and [director and producer] Monta Bell when I barged in: 'Look,' I said, 'Nobody does what I ask...'

"So Zukor came down and told them to do it my way; and by 5.30 we had two takes in the can. Next day I went to the studio very nervous. But as I went in, the big Irish doorman, who'd always ignored me before, raised his hat and bowed. It seemed they'd had a secret 7.30 viewing of the rushes in the studio, and were so pleased with the result that they'd sent it straight off to a Paramount sales conference. After this, what Mamoulian said, went. 'Well,' said George Folsey, very cheerful, when I went in, 'Where would you like your cameras today?' 'Today,' I said, 'I'll have four cameras, and I want one shooting up from the floor.' This meant they had to send out for men with pneumatic drills because the floor was concrete, two feet thick. I waited till they brought the men in: then said, 'OK. That's enough. I've had my revenge.'"

His first film in Hollywood was *City Streets*, also for Paramount.

"Shakespeare used the soliloquy to give oral expression to thoughts. Since then the soliloquy had become obsolete. But it was a wonderful device: so I wanted to use a close-up of Sylvia Sidney, alone, in prison, and superimpose over it all her impressions and recollections. Again, everybody insisted it was impossible and that the audience would never understand what was going on. I argued that in the silent cinema they had used – and the audience had accepted – stylisation – simile, visual poetry. So why not in sound? That's what I wanted to do with sound and, later, with colour. Now, of course, this use of audible thoughts over a silent close-up has become a convention..."

OPPOSITE
Marlene Dietrich and Mamoulian on the set of *The Song of Songs* (1933)

BELOW
Henry Fonda and Gene Tierney in Mamoulian's *Rings on Her Fingers* (1942)

"You know, there are ten killings in this film, and you don't *see* one of them...

"In those days the average working day was sixteen hours. I remember doing a scene at midnight with Gary Cooper and Sidney; and they fell asleep *during the take*."

DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE (1931)

"I wanted to make the transformations a real vicarious experience, more than just a trick. So I used the camera in the first person. The entire opening reel is shot as if through the eyes of Jekyll, played by Fredric March. The audience does not see him – they *are* him – until he looks into a mirror.

"To accompany the transformations I wanted a completely unrealistic sound. First I tried rhythmic beats, like a heartbeat. We tried every sort of drum, but they all sounded like drums. Then I recorded my own heart beating, and it was perfect, marvellous. Then we recorded a gong, took off the actual impact noise and reversed the reverberations. Finally we painted on the sound track; and I think that was the first time anyone had used synthetic sound like that, working from light to sound. We've never divulged – and I'm not going to tell you now – how we managed the transformations without any cuts or dissolves."

LOVE ME TONIGHT (1932)

Love Me Tonight starred Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald, and had music by Rodgers and lyrics by Hart. It has been compared to Clair and Lubitsch, regarded as a model musical by such practitioners as Gene Kelly, Vincente Minnelli and Kurt Weill, and is clearly one of Mamoulian's favourites.

"By now I could use visual and aural images as I pleased. For instance when MacDonald's awful aunts open their mouths, you hear the yapping of little dogs instead of their voices. Then there's a moment where MacDonald is fearfully embarrassed and drops a vase; and there I have the sound of dynamite exploding, because that, emotionally, is the size of it. But they were very shocked in the studio!"

GARBO AND QUEEN CHRISTINA (1933)

"Garbo is a wonderful instrument, which must be treated right. She is an intuitive artist with very good and correct instincts... I'd heard she was very difficult, and would insist that everyone except the cameraman – including the director – must leave the set when she was playing an intimate scene. I couldn't have that, of course; and she said, 'No, I won't do that to you.'

"We started the first day's work, and I said, 'Well, let's rehearse.' 'Oh no,' she said, 'I never rehearse. I can't. You tell me what I do and where I go. Then take it. The first take is always the best.' Eventually I persuaded her to try one shot both ways: 'And you must promise to do it my way if yours doesn't work.' So we did one take her way, then began to rehearse. As we rehearsed, she said, 'You know, you're getting less and less. 'If only you knew,' I said, 'I'm getting more and more.' When we'd done both takes, she came up to me and whispered, 'Please do not print the first one.' So after that we always rehearsed.

'There's a moment in *Love Me Tonight* where Jeanette MacDonald drops a vase; and I have the sound of dynamite exploding, because that, emotionally, is the size of it. But they were very shocked in the studio!'

"The scene in the inn bedroom, where she walks all round the room, touching everything, caressing everything, storing the whole place in her memory – to my mind it's a sonnet. It was done to a metronome. I explained to her: 'This has to be sheer poetry and feeling. The movement must be like a dance. Treat it the way you would do it to music.' I always divide people into those who are crazy about this scene and those who ask what the heck's it all about anyway?

"There's an example of how logic is not always artistic truth. In the last scene, she is standing on the prow of a sailing ship moving forward; yet her hair is blowing *backwards*. People often point out – quite correctly – that the wind must be behind, so that her hair should, logically, blow forwards. But if I'd shown it like that, even though it would be correct according to natural laws, it would not give the same sense of motion forward.

"That last scene presented a lot of difficulties. L.B. Mayer called me and said we must change the end of the script: it was too unhappy and depressing. We must keep John Gilbert alive. Well, we couldn't do that, of course; but it was true that we had in some way to make the ending uplifting, exhilarating. I had the idea of moving in to a big close-up of Garbo standing on the prow; but at the time that presented difficulties. Bill Daniels, the cameraman, said it was impossible because as you changed the lens the diffusion changed. Then I remembered the magic lantern I'd had as a child in Tiflis, with four pictures on a single slide. So I suggested that they had four graded diffusers in one slide, mounted in a carriage in front of the lens. They went straight off and made it and brought it back the same afternoon. It worked perfectly. Now, of course, it's standard practice.

"Garbo asked me: 'What do I play in this scene?' Remember she is standing there for 150 feet of film – 90 feet of them in close-up. I said: 'Have you heard of tabula rasa? I want your face to be a blank sheet of paper. I want the writing to be done by every member of the audience. I'd like it if you could avoid even blinking your eyes, so that you're nothing but a beautiful mask.' So in fact there is *nothing* on her face: but everyone who has seen the film will tell you what she is thinking and feeling. And always it's something different. Each one writes his own ending to the film; and it's interesting that this is the scene everyone remembers most clearly..."

BECKY SHARP (1935)

For *We Live Again* (1934), an adaptation of Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, with Fredric March and Anna Sten, Mamoulian brought the stage designer Serge Sudekin to Hollywood, while on *Becky Sharp* he had Robert Edmond Jones. This was the first film in the new Technicolor three-colour process. It was to have been directed by Lowell Sherman, but he died after two weeks' shooting and Mamoulian took over. An extraordinarily appreciative adaptation of Thackeray, and one of the most beautiful colour films ever made, it probably contains Mamoulian's best work in the cinema.

"As soon as you use an element on the screen it becomes subject to dramatic laws. This is as true of colour as of everything else. So I wanted to shoot everything from the start. I took four or five weeks to prepare my plans. My idea was to build up the colour dramatically. I wanted to start with black, white, grey; then ooze into colour. And I wanted the dramatic climax of the film to coincide

OPPOSITE
Anna Sten in *We Live Again* (1934)

ABOVE
Rouben Mamoulian on the set of *Silk Stockings* (1957) with Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse

with the colour climax, which would be predominantly red, because that is the nature of red. It's strange, you know, that this should be so – that red should be the most exciting colour to the eye – because scientifically and physically speaking it is the most sluggish colour of all – 36,000 vibrations as against 76,000 with yellow. It has almost no light value – the nearest approach to black. Scientifically it is the least aggressive; psychologically it is the most aggressive. It's an odd phenomenon; the brightest colour is really yellow. But colour's my hobby-horse...

"In planning *Becky Sharp* I faced an interesting dilemma. The climax is the ball before Waterloo. A messenger arrives and quietly informs Wellington that the French army is forming. The news is passed around the room and the guests gradually begin to leave. Now, logically, the first to leave should be the military; but that would mean that all the red would be drained out before the other colours – the colours of the civilians' costumes. Colour is such a strong emotional medium, of such subconscious potency, that if the gradation were wrong here it could destroy the fundamental reality of the scene. It sounds practically insane; but what I did was to sort the extras into colour groups. Then, one by one, each colour group left the ballroom, till only the red were left. Hence the officers were the *last* to go instead of the first. On the set it looked absurd, but that's the way I shot and cut it. And no one has ever remarked on it; because it makes such sense dramatically."

BLOOD AND SAND (1941)

Following *Becky Sharp* he made *The Gay Desperado* (1936), a musical satire about Mexican banditti; *High Wide and Handsome* (1937), a pioneering drama, and a screen version of Clifford Odets' *Golden Boy* (1938). In 1940 and 1941 followed two pictures with Tyrone Power. *The Mark of Zorro* was an undistinguished swashbuckler, but in *Blood and Sand* Mamoulian continued his experiments with colour.

"Colour cinematography tends to brighten and cheapen natural colour. The problem was to counteract that. I realised that colour in films is nearer to painting than to the stage. Now if you look, for instance, at a crimson cloak painted by El Greco, you'll find that what first appears as a mass of colour is in fact a subtle blending of all sorts of shades, with patches of pink and blue and purple and green. So I treated the colour the way a painter would. I devised what came to be known as the Mamoulian Palette. Beside me on the set I had a huge box of scraps of material – scarves and handkerchiefs and so on, in all colours – so that if a costume or a set needed a bit more of a particular colour – a colour accent, as it were – I could put it in myself. And I had a collection of spray guns beside me, so that I could spray colour on a costume or set or even an actor. The art director had made me a beautiful chapel; and he was very upset when I sprayed everything with green and grey paint. Then again, there's a banquet, which was done entirely in black and white. There were flowers on the table and, naturally, the leaves were green. I think when they saw me painting them black,they went and told Mr Zanuck I'd gone out of my mind."

'I have a sort of trademark: in all my films there is a cat. When we'd finished *Silk Stockings* I realised there was no cat. So, at great expense, we had an extra day's shooting, just for the cat. Did you notice it?'

After *Rings on Her Fingers* (1942), a conventional comedy which he made to work out his contract with Fox, Mamoulian's activity in the cinema was limited for some years. This was his great period in the theatre. *Oklahoma* (1943) was the culmination of his ideal of the stage musical. *Sadie Thompson*, which he adapted with Howard Dietz, was a comparative flop; but was followed in 1945 by *Carousel*, which repeated the success of *Oklahoma*.

SUMMER HOLIDAY (1948) AND SILK STOCKINGS (1957)

Mamoulian returned to the cinema in 1948, with *Summer Holiday*, based on Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!* and praised by *Sequence* as "an enjoyable film... The designs are light and elegant and the colour attractive," although "its two styles, experimental and nostalgic... don't

always mix." It marked the transition to the cinema of Mamoulian's ideas of a musical theatre; and – appearing in the same year as *The Pirate* – it was a significant forerunner of the *On the Town* school.

"O'Neill – who was then already very sick with Parkinson's disease – was very excited by my ideas for adapting his play. The sort of thing I did: there's a scene between Mickey Rooney and the local bad girl – Marilyn Maxwell, who played it beautifully – in which she grows redder and larger with every close-up. Then there's a series of scenes in the styles of famous American painters – Grant Wood, Thomas Benton, John Curry. From them I learned what marvellous things you can do just by using different shades of the same colour... One of the pictures was Grant Wood's *Daughters of the American Revolution*. "We saw lots of elderly ladies for this, and finally I picked out three who might well have been the original sitters – quintessentially American. I spoke to one of them, but she said, '*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur Mamoulian, mais je ne parle point américain*."

Nine years, and more productions in the theatre separated this film from *Silk Stockings*, a Cole Porter musical adaptation of Ernst Lubitsch's *Ninotchka* (1939).

"In this film I was most interested in dance as a dramatic expression. I had two marvellous dancers – [Fred] Astaire and [Cyd] Charisse – and I wanted to use dancing to show the progress of their love story. I'd begun to use dancing like this, as a means of interpreting character, as early as *Love Me Tonight*, of course, which is really the same recipe as *Oklahoma* and way ahead of its time.

"I have a sort of trademark: somewhere in every one of my films there is a cat. When we'd finished *Silk Stockings* I suddenly realised there was no cat. So, at great expense, we had an extra day's shooting, just for the cat. Did you notice it?"

CLEOPATRA

Mamoulian is still full of energy, enthusiasm, ideas – for an opera film in Italy, a ballet film in Russia, co-productions and so on. His most recent project, *Cleopatra* [1963, directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz once Mamoulian had left the production] was one of his rare abortive ventures.

"I was engaged on *Cleopatra* for one year and three months. I resigned because I felt in the circumstances I could not entirely realise the film I had conceived... There were many changes of plan: first we were to shoot in Egypt; then in Spain; then in England. I would have liked to shoot it all in Egypt, of course. In the end I did shoot a few night scenes in England. It was a real English winter; and the great white columns of that beautiful set were wreathed in light mists; while every time anyone spoke, there were clouds of steam from his mouth. It had a marvellous quality, quite beautiful, but not exactly Alexandria!

"I didn't see it at all as spectacle – which has no interest for me for its own sake. What interested me in this was the character of Cleopatra. I'd only have used spectacle where it was a necessary background. Visually, of course, it would have been fascinating. Egyptian design of that period had a wonderful simplicity and elegance, and such interesting colour: black, yellow, green, purple, very little red or orange. Alexandria was a white city, because it was a Greek city. Imagine the contrast, and the mutual impact, of the highly civilised Egypt and the rude democracy of Rome... *Cleopatra* could have been fine art and fine entertainment. It's possible, you know – not a contradiction. Indeed, I think it's an ideal." ■

ABOVE
Rings on Her Fingers

OPPOSITE
Rouben Mamoulian (foreground, in glasses)

'SOME OF THE SCREEN'S BEST MOMENTS WERE REALISED BECAUSE A DIRECTOR WENT AGAINST ALL REASON, ALL LOGIC': THE CAREER OF ROUBEN MAMOULIAN

Born in 1897 to an Armenian family in imperial Russian Georgia, Mamoulian trained at Moscow Art Theatre before founding a drama studio in his hometown of Tiflis (now Tbilisi). He fled the Soviet regime in 1920 by travelling to England and then the United States where he directed theatre and opera at the Eastman Theatre in New York.

In 1929 he directed his first feature, the early sound film *Applause*, for which he mounted the camera's soundproof booth on wheels allowing movement. Mamoulian moved to Hollywood in 1931 where he made the gangster film *City Streets* and the first sound version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* featuring impressive make-up and lighting effects during the infamous transformation sequence.

Repeatedly switching genre, he made the early musical *Love Me Tonight* (1932) starring Maurice Chevalier, the 1933 romantic drama *The Song of Songs* starring Marlene Dietrich and the historical biopic *Queen Christina* (1933) starring Greta Garbo. Mamoulian then directed Tolstoy's *Resurrection* as *We Live Again* (1934) and William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* as *Becky Sharp* (1935), the first Technicolor feature.

After a short return to Broadway, Mamoulian struggled to find success with *The Gay Desperado* (1936), *High, Wide and Handsome* (1937) and *Golden Boy* (1939). This did not prevent him from moving to Twentieth Century-Fox for the swashbuckling adventure *The Mask of Zorro* (1940), the bull-fighting epic *Blood and Sand* (1941) and the screwball comedy *Rings on Her Fingers* (1942). He began work on *Laura* (1944) but was replaced by Fox with Otto Preminger. Disappointed, Mamoulian returned to Broadway.

His last two films were *Summer Holiday* (1948) and *Silk Stockings* (1957). He also shot some new sequences for the US release of Powell and Pressburger's *Gone to Earth* (1952), retitled *The Wild Heart*. His career ended with the indignity of being replaced twice more; on the adaptation of a musical he had made famous, *Porgy and Bess* (1959), and on *Cleopatra* (1963). Mamoulian died in 1987 aged 90.

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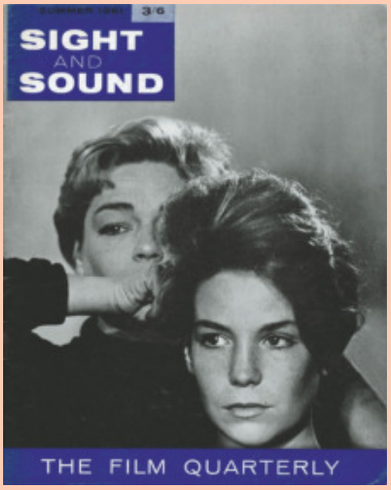
DAVID ROBINSON



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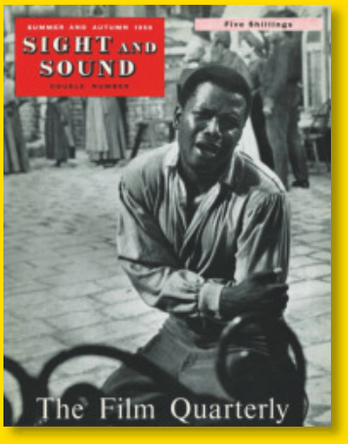

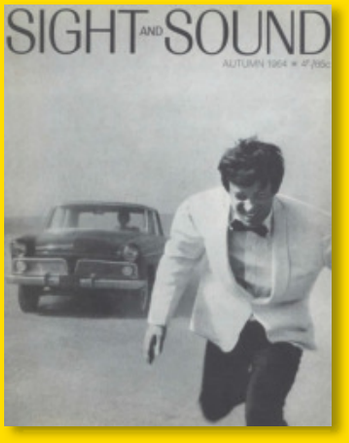

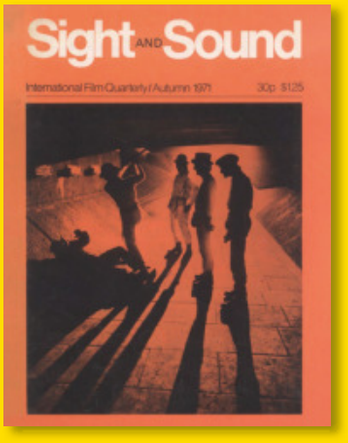

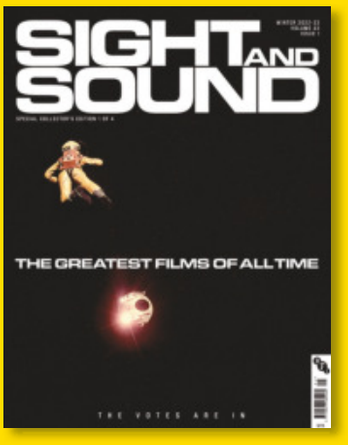

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THIS MONTH IN... 1992

It's interesting to note that several of the directors covered in this issue from just over 30 years ago are still going strong well into their seventies and eighties. Ridley Scott is about to release *Napoleon*, starring Joaquin Phoenix as the emperor, with an *Alien* prequel and *Gladiator 2* slated for the near future. Both Michael Mann and Woody Allen had well-received films at this year's Venice film festival, respectively *Ferrari* and *Coup de Chance*. Neil Jordan is not only still directing but also publishing acclaimed novels (this year's *The Well of Saint Nobody*). As for David Lynch, after the triumph of *Twin Peaks: The Return* there have been various shorts, but he's now rumoured to be working on a new TV series called *Unrecorded Night*. Age it seems cannot wither them.

COVER

One figure sadly not still working is our 1992 cover star Daniel Day-Lewis, who decided to retire from acting after his role in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Phantom Thread* (2017); here he plays Hawkeye in Michael Mann's *Last of the Mohicans*. Mann gives a revealing career interview in this issue to former *Film Comment* editor Gavin Smith, but the film is given short shrift by reviewer Henry Sheehan later in the mag.

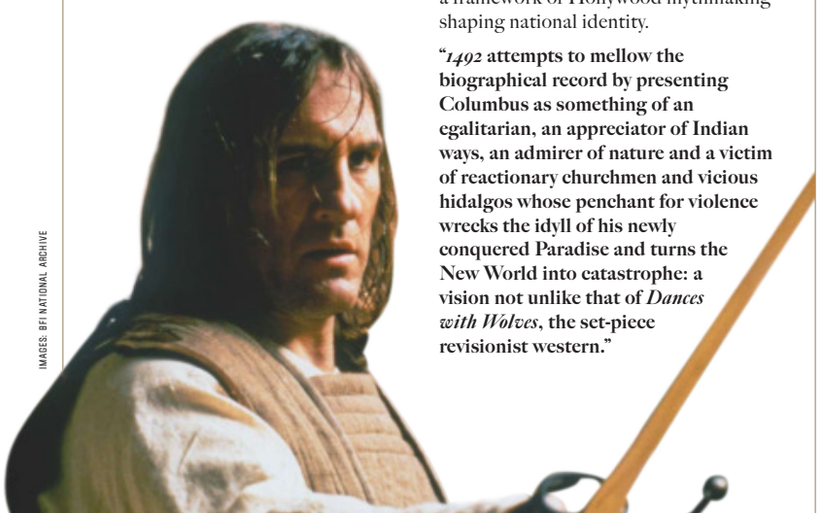
"Daniel Day-Lewis's Hawkeye is an astonishing array of bad choices, turning the rough-and-ready frontiersman into a droll man-about-the-wilderness... Mann probably encouraged Day-Lewis in these choices, since they fit into the pattern of destruction that marks the whole project."

***1492* attempts to mellow the record by presenting Columbus as something of an egalitarian**

INSIDE STORY

In a fascinating, erudite article, filmmaker and theorist Peter Wollen placed Ridley Scott's epic *1492: Conquest of Paradise*, starring Gérard Depardieu as Christopher Columbus (pictured left), in a framework of Hollywood mythmaking shaping national identity.

"*1492* attempts to mellow the biographical record by presenting Columbus as something of an egalitarian, an appreciator of Indian ways, an admirer of nature and a victim of reactionary churchmen and vicious hidalgos whose penchant for violence wrecks the idyll of his newly conquered Paradise and turns the New World into catastrophe: a vision not unlike that of *Dances with Wolves*, the set-piece revisionist western."



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REVIEWS

THE CRYING GAME

Jonathan Romney found an intriguing angle on the latest from Irish director Neil Jordan.

"The film could be taken as an enquiry into the true nature of a Neil Jordan film. Apart from the way it shifts mode a quarter of the way through – from opened-out intimate theatre to urban sexual fantastic – it also conflates elements of pretty much all Jordan's work, and finally provides a thread that makes his diverse, occasionally directionless oeuvre seem like a coherent overall project."

TWIN PEAKS: FIRE WALK WITH ME

Kim Newman was quick to recognise the brilliance of Lynch's film spin-off from his celebrated TV series.

"In the monster father figure of Leland/Bob, Lynch has a bogeyman who puts Craven's Freddie Krueger to shame by bringing into the open the incest, abuse and brutality which the Elm Street movies conceal behind MTV surrealism and flip wisecracks... the images (and, as usual with Lynch, the multi-layered and terrifying soundtrack) couldn't be any more disturbing."

HUSBANDS AND WIVES

Jonathan Romney again, this time drawing an analogy that would surely delight the film's director Woody Allen.

"As individuals, Jack and Sally are less than the totality they form as 'Jack and Sally'... the film demonstrates that they need first to be separated before they can properly be together. As far as such observations go, much of the film outdoes Rohmer at his most acute, and is certainly more acerbic."

GOTHIC SHADOWS

GOODBYE CRUEL WORLD *The Elephant Man*

Kevin Jackson interviewed the acclaimed British cinematographer Freddie Francis, who shot endless great films such as *Room at the Top* (1959), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) and *The Elephant Man* (1980) as well as directing a good number of horror films.

"I always say that there are three kinds of photography: there's good photography, there's bad photography, and there's the right photography. And sometimes the right photography doesn't have to be good photography. In this day and age, I don't think one should be able to recognise the cameraman's work from the photography. What defines a good cinematographer is an ability to read the director's mind, so that when you're working together the director is really lighting the picture through you."

'What defines a good cinematographer is an ability to read the director's mind, so that when you're working the director is really lighting the picture through you'

ELSEWHERE IN THE ISSUE

- A study of the complex ways in which *Bicycle Thieves* manipulates the viewer.
- A look at how Film on Four draws on the strengths of British TV drama as it celebrated its tenth year.
- Four Russian filmmakers discuss old Soviet films and the fate of contemporary cinema in their native country.
- David Robinson reports from the Venice film festival.
- Reviews of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Single White Female*

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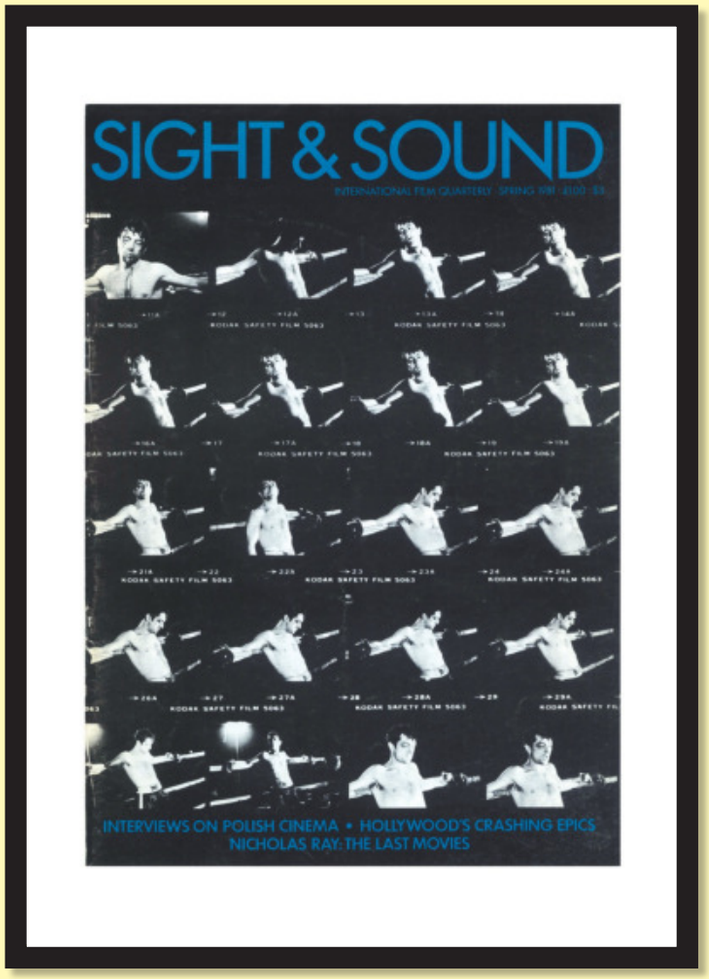
THE RED SHOES (1948). WINTER 1948-49
This striking cover from Powell & Pressburger's exploration of the intoxication of the arts shows Moira Shearer's Victoria Page mid-performance, under the spotlight, enrapturing her audience.



RAGING BULL (1980). SPRING 1981
Robert De Niro's Jake La Motta is a tragic but defiant figure in the stills from Scorsese's classic boxing biopic Raging Bull which adorned this 1981 cover.

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ENDINGS

Midnight Cowboy (1969)

Jon Voight's cowboy hustler and his unlikely soulmate Ratso see their dreams crushed on a road to nowhere at the close of John Schlesinger's classic buddy movie

BY SOPHIA SATCHELL-BAEZA

Locked out of his room, his worldly belongings confiscated because he can't pay the hotel bill, Texan hustler Joe Buck (Jon Voight) wanders the streets of New York looking for something to eat. Peering into the window of a diner at eggs and bacon spitting on the stove, he catches the glance of a pale, lonely dishwasher. It's a reminder of both the dead-end job Joe left behind in Texas and his likely impending fortunes in New York. Soon after, Joe bumps into Ratso (Dustin Hoffman), a petty criminal who had conned him out of money when he first arrived in the city, but this time they wind up forming a close friendship, one that proves to be a buttress against the cruelty, misery and squalor of New York City. This is the kind of place, Joe discovers, where people will just walk over a body on the sidewalk outside Tiffany's.

In mirrors and windows, reflections punctuate key moments of self-realisation in *Midnight Cowboy*, John Schlesinger's X-rated Oscar-winning buddy movie about two lonely hustlers who are struggling to survive. As Joe's dreams of making money sleeping with rich women quickly crumble, he sees himself reflected in a subway chewing-gum machine. Pale, thin and waxen, the figure presented to him is a far cry from the stud reputation he held in his small Texan town, a reputation which, we find out in flashback, is rooted in a childhood of sexual violence, repression and shame. As Nico crooned on one of The Velvet Underground's most romantic songs, "I'll be your mirror/ reflect what you are." Similarly, the pair start mirroring each other's ambitions in the face of seemingly impossible odds. Ratso becomes Joe's pimp to help him to become more streetwise, all the better to target the wealthy women of Fifth Avenue. Joe, meanwhile, tries to help Ratso find a cure for his lung condition and escape the Lower East Side slums for a new life in Florida.

Much has been written about *Midnight Cowboy*'s queerness and its portrayal of fractured American masculinity. Both elements certainly widen the deep gulf that erupts between how the characters imagine their lives will be and the actual reality amid the inescapable crush of loneliness and poverty. Intensive flashbacks flesh out Joe's lifetime of sexual trauma and loneliness: from family abandonment and rape to hints of an incestuous relationship with his grandmother. Whether repressed homosexual desires play a part in Joe's horrifying homophobic attack on a middle-aged john is a question for another text. Certainly, Ratso's fantasies plot a very different escape route. Ratso dreams of living on coconut milk and sun, what he calls the "two basic items necessary to sustain life". His squalid room is lined with posters for Florida orange juice and glossy airline promotions, a fantasy fuelled – and made ironic by – the oversaturation of the mass media, which pumps out its chimeras of American prosperity.

Midnight Cowboy tragically ends as the fantasy of escape is on the cusp of becoming real. Ratso's health has deteriorated so badly that they flee to Florida in the hope of a cure. In a sense, the movie takes us back to the beginning, with a bus journey across America to start a new life. This time, though, the trip is quieter, more sober. Joe, the young buck, has become the carer, the parent, probably the lover too. They've ditched their old identities by chucking their clothes in the dustbin. There's something particularly heart-breaking about seeing Joe abandon his cowboy clothes to slip into a summer shirt and chinos: it reads like a last-ditch bid to assimilate. A crumbling stereotype of American masculinity that's already been appropriated by the Times Square gay hustlers and queer underground filmmakers, the cowboy outfit is no longer fit for purpose. Ratso's new outfit is, appropriately, a Hawaiian shirt decked in palm trees, a relic of the fantasy escape route he won't quite manage to complete.

We realise before Joe does: the camera pulls out as Joe turns to Ratso and sees that he is dead. His head is lolling against the window, and soon the passengers will ignore this body too, and start fiddling with their make-up. The camera tracks the two friends from the window of the bus, framed in reflections of verdant palm trees. Earlier in the film, we saw Joe find in his mirror image a measure of just how low he has sunk. Now it is the audience who sees in the glass a paradise that remains just out of reach. As the bus rolls on, we see Joe cradling his dead best friend, the fronds of palm trees moving in the breeze, as the screen fades to black.

***Midnight Cowboy* tragically ends just as the fantasy of escape is on the cusp of becoming real. Ratso's health has deteriorated so badly that they flee to Florida in the hope of a cure**

ABOVE Dustin Hoffman and Jon Voight in the film's closing moments

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